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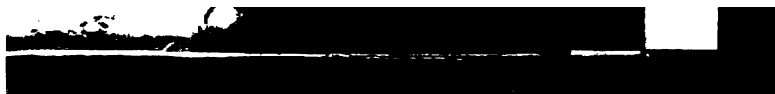
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1850
New
York





ALMOND-BLOSSOM





By the same Author

**BELONGING
CONQUEST
FRAILTY
POSSESSION
THE FLAME
INSTEAD
PAYMENT
STOLEN HOURS
NEVERTHELESS
REALITY**

ALMOND-BLOSSOM

BY

OLIVE WADSLEY

Author of "Belonging," "Conquest," etc.



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DODD, MEAD & COMPANY

1921

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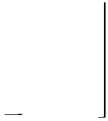
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To

NEWMAN FLOWER



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BOOK I

100



ALMOND-BLOSSOM

CHAPTER I

*"It is something to have smelt the mystic rose,
Although it break and leave the thorny rods.
It is something to have hungered once as those
Must hunger who have ate the bread of gods."*

G. K. CHESTERTON

WHEN he had quite finished breakfast, which he ate contentedly, and did not compare disparagingly with the set meal he would have had at home, but, instead, drank the really excellent coffee and consumed rolls and confiture in large quantities, Rexford strolled out from under the shade of the pink and white tasselled awning and surveyed the day.

It was a day worthy of observation—a golden and blue day, a day of crystalline clearness and etched shadows, so white was the sunshine; a day unquestionably, in Rexford's opinion, in which "to do something." Days generally meant that to him, specially in a town where the "doing" consisted in getting out of it, and if Pago was not exactly a town, it was a place of streets, and as such, meet to be left.

Rexford lit a cigarette from a tiny lighter and,

true to type, looked round for a dog, and in looking round, had an instant's vision of the courtyard of his own place, with the kennel-man grooming one of the terriers, preferably Nick, as Nick was Rexford's best-beloved.

Still visioning Nick's amber eyes and exactly "right" coat and build, Rexford strolled back into the hotel and up to his wife's room.

He walked with that very slight swing of the shoulders and even slighter looseness of gait which is so sure a betrayal of an athlete, and as he waited for a moment after his knock, he loomed very large indeed against the white-painted, narrow door.

Francesca was drinking her chocolate in bed, reading Rexford's letters for him, and planning his day.

He kissed her hair, which was enchanting, and tied back like a little girl's with a big ribbon-bow, let himself down carefully into a frail wicker chair which groaned at him, stretched, smiled at Francesca, and said:

"Well, what about it?"

He had made just that same remark every morning during the tour, and Francesca had always met his need by letting him drive her to the place she thought he would like best, where he could either swim, or fish, or shoot, or, at least, watch others engaged in some relatively arduous sport.

Those friends of Francesca who delighted to lay claim to that disturbing oddness known as "perfect

frankness" (the last characteristic which should deserve this celestial qualification, having regard to its effect on those who unwillingly receive its benefit!) often told her she "managed" Tony.

Francesca used to listen to them and smile, and relate their comment to Tony, and laugh.

Tony laughed the louder.

In point of fact Francesca loved her husband; she had fallen in love with him at once, and though she was quite aware that he was, perhaps, not very "quick," and that many people thought him heavy, whilst she agreed with them, she liked his heaviness, just as she liked his fair hair, well watered down in the morning and before dinner, but apt to become less sleek towards mid-afternoon, just as she liked his blue eyes and obstinate, boyish mouth and his whole air of strength and bigness.

This morning, in the filtered light of her room, he looked bigger than ever in his thin, white suit.

There was a knock at the door and Miguel, the waiter, came in holding an armful of yellow roses and beaming widely; he broke into a torrent of speech, descriptive of his own prowess in obtaining the flowers, their beauty, the beauty of the noble Excelentisima, his wife, and of the generosity of the Excellency himself.

Rexford lifted an eyebrow, handed the man five pesetas, and said:

"Give 'em here, will you? Thanks." He held out the roses to Francesca: "I was afraid I mightn't

get the right ones—yellow, y’know. Of course, others wouldn’t have been the same.”

He rose and sat down on the bed beside her, and they both laughed; he slid an arm round her.

“Tragedy if that comic opera little chap hadn’t been able to get ’em, wouldn’t it have been, darling, to-day of all days?”

His wife put up a white arm, drew down his head and kissed him.

“You have the loveliest ideas, Tony,” she said very gently, keeping his face to hers.

Rexford beamed.

“Oh, I dunno,” he said in the happy voice of the really assured, “but getting married to anyone like you takes a bit of forgetting, darling, y’know. I say, Fay, I can remember to-day how damn nervous I felt waiting for you to come up the aisle! It seemed an age, I can tell you, and when you did come you looked such a little kid, you made me feel shy, almost frightened of you, as if I’d no right to have you at all.”

He sat up and lit a cigarette and gave it to Francesca, then added, lighting his own:

“Y’know, darling, it seems pretty good to me to sit like this with you; as good as ten years ago in one way. I say, you seem pretty silent, old lady; anything up?”

Francesca gave a shaky little laugh:

“Nothing, parole d’honneur; but you must allow a wife to be touched by such an offering on the tenth

anniversary of her wedding day! Some husbands, my dear, instead of buying golden roses, are scanning their passbooks to see if they can afford a divorce by that time!"

Rexford laughed.

"Only the wrong sort, old girl. Question of a sense of values, or no sense, rather, in the beginning."

He rose, and straightened his tie before the mirror.

"I don't want to brag about my brilliance, Fay, y'know, but you'll own I knew a good thing when I saw it!"

He strolled back to the bed and stood smiling down at her.

"If you *were* thinking of getting up——?"

"Darling, at once. Call Mathilde for me, will you, as you go out? Her door's the next but one on the right. But, Tony, just a minute—come here."

He turned back.

"No, here-r—here-*est* then!"

He stood beside her again, a little mystified; she held out a hand to him.

"Kneel down, darling, you're so far away. And don't look so frightened; no one is going to do anything to you! Tony——"

"Yes, old girl, what is it?" His puzzled eyes met hers unwaveringly.

She drew his head suddenly close against her shoulder.

“ Tony, you have been so endlessly dear; you say—you have said this morning—things which have reached my heart and, in a way, hurt it. No, don’t move, I don’t mean hurt in one sense. It was your last remark about values. Oh, darling, have you had such a return; don’t you ever regret, ever think it’s rather—rather hard luck when Charles comes with the boys? ”

Rexford forced up his head from under her restraining hand.

“ Now look here,” he said strongly, “ I do not, never have ‘thought,’ as you call it, or regretted I took you hunting that time. We both believed it was all right, and the most tremendous bit of luck of all my life was when the doctors told me you’d live after the accident. Listen to me, Fay, and believe this: a man doesn’t care a damn about anything but his wife when it’s her life or anyone else’s in the question. The choice is certain, inevitable, you simply don’t *choose*; it’s a fact, a part of life, because she’s a part of your own life. As for Charles and the boys, I dunno I’ve ever seen a boy much more of a sport than young Charles, and if you labour under the delusion that I spend my life longing for the unattainable, it may interest you to learn, old girl, that I scarcely ever think of it!”

He rose, picked up her white silk peignoir and held it out.

She slipped into it, and he stood for a moment holding her so in his arms.

Then he released her.

"All right, now?"

"Absolutely."

He tightened his hold of her, laughing down at her.

"Nothin' but a baby sometimes, are you, what? Get a move on with your dressing now, won't you? I'm off to buy some of those native cigarettes as an experiment; they're like young cigars, and pretty strong, I should think."

Francesca heard him go downstairs, pause for a moment in the hall, then, from the window, she watched him stroll down the uneven little street.

"Darling, darling liar," she whispered.

And to himself Rexford was saying:

"I did that thundering well; she never had the faintest notion I was bluffing! And Fay's absolutely one of the best. It's simply rough luck on us, that's all, and it's no good grousing. Young Charles will do the place credit, that's a comfort."

He thought, as he walked along, that Spain seemed a country of which babies appeared to approve; they swarmed on every doorstep; each dusty gutter was someone's royal kingdom.

A child toddled up to him, skilled already, at the ripe age of three or four, in the art of appeal, and begged urgently.

Rexford burst out laughing, gave the baby a

peseta, and listened to a fluent flow of thanks. But other babies had watched the luck of this favoured pioneer; they made a bee-line for Rexford, and whilst the unsteady clutched his trousers as a support, the older ones clung to his hands, and his ears were assailed by torrential lisping.

"Well, I dunno!" he said, smiling down at his exigent adorers. "Here, catch, you infant pirates!"

He flung a handful of small coins to them, watched them scramble, of course compensated the luckless, and then walked on in search of his cigarettes.

He wondered, for the hundredth time, "what Fay would say" to adopting a little kid for the fun of the thing? and, facing the truth to himself, to give life that interest which it lacked for him; yet, not for an instant would he have dreamt of hinting at this idea.

It recurred again and again though, whilst he loitered in the sunshine waiting for Francesca, and watched the apparently endless families possessed by every self-respecting Spaniard disporting themselves in the warm dust.

Some men are born with the protective instinct of paternity; it is sufficiently rare to find a man who is not fond of children; but there are men in whom this feeling is a profound quality, and who stand in a finer relationship to life by reason of this quality than any other they possess.

In this category heredity and choice had placed

Rexford, and his inclusion made him a good landlord, a perfect uncle, and a chivalrous soul, and, as well, deny the fact as he might, a dissatisfied man.

Paradoxically, the quality which spurred his nature to discontent was the very one which prevented his voicing that discontent, for that protectiveness, which was one of the strongest tenets of his creed, was naturally a keenest influence with regard to Francesca, and whatever joy a certain course of action might afford Tony, he would never mention it to Francesca, because he knew quite well that it would hurt her, however she might dissemble to him.

He was not a particularly unselfish man; simply he loved his wife; she was his own.

She came down on to the veranda now and waved to him with a white sunshade.

In the searching sunshine she looked about twenty-four. In reality, she was thirty-four; but she had that extremely English complexion which seems neither to fade nor thicken, and that hair which is like both ashes and gold, palely golden hair. She had always been called beautiful; as a matter of fact she was an extremely pretty woman, who was very beautifully cared for; a woman who possessed the gift of appearance, and who would have seemed *chic* had she been poor. She was slender to the verge of thinness, and dressed, therefore, to add to the first effect and conceal the latter.

Rexford crossed to her and put up the white, green-lined sunshade.

"I've ordered the car," Francesca told him, pulling on loose wash-leather gloves. "We'll go to the river, don't you think, and perhaps we might get a bathe after lunch? I've had our suits packed."

"Oh, splendid," Rexford said.

The car came round as he spoke; a touring car with the hood up because of the heat.

Rexford always drove himself; motoring in every detail was a passion with him; and one of which he never tired. When he was not in one of his cars he was probably about it, or under it, a pipe glued between his teeth, and a hoarse, hissing noise accompanying his labours; the car was always alluded to with affection as "she," and "her" actions and virtues occupied much space in Rexford's conversation. The Spanish tour had been partly (and most enjoyably) spent in tinkering up the quite perfect Rolls each day after its trials and tribulations over the worst roads probably in Europe.

All Rexford's servants adored him. Carvel, the chauffeur, who had, it was understood, passed intricate examinations in motor-engineering, would bridle with pleasure when Rexford argued with him, quite wrongly, on some technical point, and murmur: "Yes, my lord," for the sheer pleasure of receiving his master's attention.

He settled in the back now whilst Rexford took

the wheel, and after walking the car through the village children, let it out on the Seville road. As they rushed along Francesca noticed that the aloe trees were in full flower; they held themselves with dauntless, upright splendour despite the menace of the dust; occasionally a shrine was visible; one shone out by reason of a wreath of orange blossom some worshipper had placed upon the cross, where it glowed in the white sunshine like a living crown of stars.

Oxen-drawn carts, leisurely affairs which zig-zagged about, trailed peacefully along the road, their drivers refusing, with bovine obstinacy, to hurry, in spite of Rexford's "free speech," the irate Carvel's infuriated adjuration, and Francesca's laughter.

"It's so nice to slow up, then one can really see things," she explained to Rexford, whose face was set in lines of resigned, yet savage irritation; that expression common to those true motorists who get into a car for the purpose of getting out of it again in the shortest possible space of time, and who expect, nay demand, that any obstruction in their road shall also "get out" likewise in record time. To these ardent pace-makers the car, as a vehicle for sight-seeing, for casual enjoyment of the summer breeze, simply is not. To them, to slow down is a grievance; to stop, for any purpose save that of arrival, anathema.

The orchestra of Heaven might have played music of exultant sweetness above the bonnet, but to such a car-lover as Rexford, one rhythmic "purr" of a "just-so" engine would have been far more beautiful than any celestial strain, and the cries of the tortured damned would have moved him far less than one squeak from a nut which needed oil.

Francesca, aware of this outlook, made no effort to oppose it; she knew better than to distract an absorbed mind by any allusion to the beauty of Nature, or to show a desire to discuss any topic save the "going" of the car.

Upon their arrival at Barazio, and when he had made a preliminary but searching inspection of the car, Tony would again become his usual pleasant self. After he had, in all probability, delivered a spirited and abstruse monologue on the good behaviour of the car as evidenced by the drive, touched lightly on any feat of steering afforded him by the obstructive and accursed traffic, and generally given a technical word sketch of the engine's prowess at every milestone of the road, he would ask Francesca if she had not enjoyed the country through which they had passed. This, save for isolated moments when a goat, an ox, or any two-footed, equally infamous idiot (bent, apparently, upon speedy suicide) had held up their progress, had been to Francesca, by reason of the amazing speed, merely an indistinguishable blur of dust, and green-and-yellow patches, which custom and instinct had

helped her to recognize as fields, and which (having due regard to the obligations of matrimony) she had accepted as a "view," and would then dilate upon as "charming scenery" to Tony.

To-day proved no exception to the rule: Tony got out, helped Francesca, and instantly bent over the car in an attitude which displayed at once the excellent fit of his suit, and enabled him to peer into the recesses of the engine; Carvel hovered about him, and both men murmured darkly to one another.

Francesca strolled into the hotel, a little inn-like place, with the same vine-covered veranda and pink walls and little stained tables as the Pago place, and ordered luncheon, and in due course Tony joined her, clamouring as usual for a wash, a drink, and his food.

He came back to the veranda very shortly, favoured Francesca with his views on the drive, as per schedule, and then, having filled his glass, asked heartily:

"Enjoyed it, old girl? Like the scenery?"

Francesca mentioned the aloe trees, the dust, the shrine, and Tony grunted appreciably. When he had finished an excellent lunch, he suggested, the car being now housed in a shed and its rest guarded by the faithful Carvel, that they should "look over" the place before driving out to the river for their swim.

They strolled together down the main street, both

smoking cigarettes, Francesca's hand linked in Tony's elbow.

The street was silent, ice-cool, sun-hot, as the houses let in the light or obstructed it. Like so many Cordovan towns, the place gave a strange impression of aloofness, of chill, half-contemptuous indifference to modernity and its claims.

These towns seem never to lose entirely the effect of their ancient Eastern rule—a rule at once more subtle and more ruthless than any other; it seems as if a faint imprint of that sinister influence still lingers; there are still echoes of savage, stifled feuds, smothered cries, inexorable yet hidden tyrannies, trifling yet significant echoes of the centuries-dead omnipotence.

"Rum old place," Tony said, as halting before the church of San Pablo he stared up at it gravely, shutting his eyes for an instant against the dazzling effect made by the sunshine striking the black and white tiles of the roof.

"Let's go in," Francesca said suddenly.

"All right."

They threw away their cigarettes, and Tony pushed open a small door; before it there hung a heavy leather curtain, and as he held it for Francesca to pass in, it seemed to her as if a visible cool peace met her gently.

She sat just inside the church and Tony stood behind her.

The sun was pouring through one small window,

and its spear of goldenness was thick inset with gorgeous green and scarlet and purple jewels from the coloured glass.

No one was in the church save their two selves; it was very, very dark and chill and austere, and yet, it seemed to Francesca, kindly.

Near by was an altar to the Virgin, and Francesca deciphered the words engraved on the stone railing, behind which the candles burnt high and clear in the still air: "For those we love."

She slipped a hand into Tony's pocket and took out some money and went across to the little shrine and bought candles and lit them.

Tony watched her; like every other man of his type he did not "think much about religion"; indeed it is probable he never deliberately thought of it, but he believed in it nevertheless; he classed it inevitably in his mind with the stability of the Empire to which he had the honour to belong, and all enduring "country" things—the soil, freshness and rain.

But, for one instant, his eyes on Francesca's bent, slender form, the faint mist of goldenness visible beneath her hat, imagery touched his mind.

He went forward and knelt beside her, remembering indistinctly, and yet rather poignantly, their marriage, the child's death, their home, their life together.

Francesca smiled at him, and he put an arm about her and drew her up.

Out in the sunshine, back to normality again, he gave a quick sigh; he was grateful for normality and the sunshine and the lizard strolling, for once, in Francesca's direction.

"Let's get a move on, shall we?" he asked.

He glanced at Francesca as he walked beside her; the day had held one or two pretty "stiff" moments, their talk that morning, then this church business. He said:

"I say, Fay, we shall have to celebrate to-night, y'know. Get some decent champagne from somewhere, and you must tog up, old girl, do your damnedest!"

Francesca understood exactly why he seemed rather more robustly ordinary than usual; she agreed to his suggestions gaily, and by the time they reached the inn, Tony had lost his sense of "little shadows," as she had fully meant he should do.

They raced off again, of course, this time in the direction of the river, which, at the pace they went, they reached most speedily.

It glittered gorgeously before them, shining like a chain of emeralds set in silver.

Unfortunately, however, the bank afforded no shelter at all, though they ran along it for some miles; then, in the distance, a rough tent appeared.

"That'll do," Tony said, "we'll pay 'em to let us use it."

But upon arrival the tent proved to be empty,

though a litter of household things, and a string of washing outside, testified to the fact it had been occupied that morning.

Tony peered in.

"It's all right," he said, withdrawing his head; "bit of a frowst, but you needn't be in there long. Cut on in now, and if anyone turns up before you're ready, I'll speak 'em fair."

Francesca slid out of her clothes very swiftly, and into her bathing suit; she stepped on to the sand, which struck hot through her sandals just as Tony plunged into the water and shouted to her that it was "topping—icy cold—ripping."

He swam magnificently; he was already far down stream by the time Francesca had made a dozen strokes.

A bridge, a rough stone affair, low bending, uneven, crossed the river a few hundred yards away. Tony had nearly reached it when Francesca heard him shout and saw him dive, come up, and dive again; and then she saw, on the bridge, rocking herself in frenzy of emotion, a woman, and a moment later (the whole episode was one of two minutes perhaps), Tony reappeared, his fair head close to another smaller head, swimming over hand, and making for the bank.

Francesca swam in too, and ran towards him, catching up her bathing wrap as she ran.

Tony was already on his knees beside a child, a mere baby of two or three, and was attempting arti-

facial respiration; Francesca knew the movements; she, too, knelt down, and helped to work the tiny arms; she was conscious, as the blinding sunshine fastened on her back like a blister, of an incessant noise, and once she looked up and saw the baby's mother weeping uncontrollably, and between her sobs imploring each saint by name to save her little one, and a youth—expostulating, swearing, sobbing, too—standing beside her.

“Not—much—good—'fraid——” Tony gasped at last, straightening up a little, and thrusting back the hair from his forehead. “Bad luck indeed—hoped we'd save the poor little beggar!”

And just then the baby opened the greenest eyes Francesca had ever seen, and smiled deliberately at Tony, meeting his glance with a sort of steady delight, seeming by that radiant smile to acknowledge his help and make further claim on him in one.

Tony sat back and roared with laughter, and Francesca bent over the baby and worked on it again until it protested unsmilingly and vehemently.

The parents came forward and burst into ecstatic thanks, to which Tony mumbled self-consciously: “All right—all right!”

His voice seemed to have a restraining influence on the baby, which had been crying stormily in its mother's arms; it stopped as he spoke, and again that gorgeous green-eyed smile appeared, made specially for Tony, smiled only at Tony.

"You rum little devil!" he said to it. And to Fay: "I say, it's rather a jolly baby, what?"

"She recognizes her rescuer; she knows you, anyway, Tony," Francesca answered.

"Do you know, I believe she does," Tony said. "What's her name?" he asked the mother.

"Dolores Juana, señor."

"Is it, by Jove! Well"—he advanced and lifted one tiny hand—"well, Dolores Juana, here's to a future meeting."

The mother urged him with a languishing glance, and Dolores played her trump card—she smiled.

Tony, grinning a little, kissed her.

Of course Francesca had seen him kiss children before, as men do kiss them, rather solemnly, and with a countenance expressive of relief, when the deed is well accomplished; but somehow, seeing Tony looking as he looked at the moment, absurdly boyish, with his hair still ruffled from the water, and clad in his bathing suit, an indescribable sensation stirred in her heart; it was as if something had closed down on it, and, holding it captive, forced it forward to accept a realization. In that instant, without quite knowing that she did so, yet aware of its advent in her mind, she presaged the future. All that happened after that golden afternoon was but a fulfilment of that first intuition.

The sway exercised by that sixth sense faded quickly; Francesca bade farewell to the mother, kissed the baby too, Tony plunged into the river and

swam to the car; in half an hour they were ready. As Francesca turned to leave the tent, the habitual dwelling-place, it appeared, of the parents of Dolores Juana, she heard Tony's voice in obvious converse with the lady of the smile herself. His conversation consisted of alternate "Hullo's!" and "Rum little devil's," with laughter at frequent intervals, overtures to friendship much appreciated by the baby, apparently, since Francesca could hear a funny little chuckle, and when she went out of the tent, found Dolores Juana seated comfortably on Tony's knee, gripping the lapel of his blazer and nearly asleep.

Her eyes closed as Francesca appeared; Tony looked up with an expression of amused questioning.

"Rather done me this time," he whispered.

Francesca stood above the two of them, and again that bitter contraction of her heart made her wince.

"Oh, don't bother," she said, in a voice she forced to be light; "I'll call the mother. We'll start for home, I think. It's been rather a strenuous afternoon, hasn't it?"

She was sickeningly aware that Tony's seraphic expression changed to one of apologetic anxiety; he rose to his feet instantly, holding the baby as carefully as he could and walked towards the mother, and gave it into her arms.

The girl curtsied and broke into a torrent of

exaggerated gratitude, but the young husband scowled.

Francesca called: "I'm ready, Tony!" Carvel brought the car nearer.

Tony thrust a hand into a pocket and drew out a note. He pushed it very gently into the baby's hand.

"You get her something," he said to the mother. "Good-bye."

The father, softened by the contemplation of Tony's gift, asked with the ready effusion of the skilled idler, to whom pleasantness is an asset: "The señor is of course a father? One sees how he loves children!"

Francesca heard Tony say: "No, I have no children." And instantly the mother of Dolores broke into a torrent of commiseration, checked suddenly by the inspiration that "the señor and his lovely señora might perhaps be on their honeymoon!"

Tony's confession of the actual celebration of the day brought a murmur of wonder, of concern; it all seemed to Francesca grotesquely arch, and yet painful.

Then, distinctly, she heard the young man say:

"The señor should adopt a little one." And at once Tony's head veered round a little way in Francesca's direction; she could see his face and the dark smiling face of the other man and Dolores Juana smiling.

Tony was speaking; she could not hear what he said, but she knew—oh! she knew!

He was suggesting that of course Dolores—such a baby could not be parted with; then, afraid of his daring, he would retreat.

He did; he came towards her now, his face a little flushed, a little self-conscious.

“Time we were moving. Sorry I kept you. Those peasants were talking to me. Nice woman, the mother. They must marry precious young here; they’ve six children already, besides that baby, and she only looks about twenty!”

He busied himself with the car for a moment, gave Francesca his hand, and climbed into the driving seat over the wheel.

He drove back in silence, a not unusual event; but, on arriving at the hotel, he did not, which was most unusual, go with Carvel into the barn which served as a garage and proceed to spend a pleasant hour overhauling a perfect machine; instead he lounged for a little while on the veranda, then went up to Francesca’s room.

“Can I come in and smoke for a bit?” he asked.

Francesca was having her hair done; she dismissed Mathilde with a smile, and Tony subsided into a wicker chair beside the dressing-table and began to fidget with Francesca’s manicure case, the tops of her scent bottles.

Francesca went on combing her hair; it lay like pale-gold silk wave, outspread upon one shoulder; from under her lashes, as she combed, she studied

Tony's rather heavy face, her fingers gripped the frail comb with sudden intensity.

Oh heavens! were all men this mixture of defenceless childishness, a sort of thick and yet rather pathetic obstinacy, and, as well, such decent niceness, a niceness which, despite its humdrumness, in spite of its usualness, yet had something rather splendid about it, combining, as it did, fidelity and chivalry—were all men beings who harrowed one's feelings and made one, when a safe course of action had been chosen in one's innermost mind, yet see beyond that safety a way which, for oneself, held neither safety nor ease, and upon which, nevertheless, the feet of another would be set as surely and steadily?

She gave a sigh, and Tony ceased twisting a gold stopper round and round, thus permanently loosening its hold, and looked up.

"Hullo! Tired?" he asked. He added slowly, staring rather intently at Francesca, obviously wishful, however, to please: "Topping your hair looks!"

Francesca murmured of motoring dust, no decent hairdresser available; a silence fell.

Tony began to turn the stopper round again; it squeaked a little at his ministrations, and that almost inaudible squeak raised a sort of stifled fury in Francesca; she longed to take the scent-bottle away from those big hands and bang it down and smash it, and demand: "Why don't you say what

you want to? Why do you force me, by your consideration for me, to give expression to the words I ache not to say—which you make me say because you are so decent? You spare me, and that I cannot bear——”

In the silence, the choked little fountain, which played in what the hotel termed its court-yard, could be heard, a bird called sleepily, the sky was a riot of sunset loveliness, all the flowers of summer seemed piled there, and as the clouds drifted apart revealing the tender, luminous dark blueness of the early evening, it was as though countless flowers dropped petals as they faded.

Tony fidgeted again; Mathilde knocked, and came in with a dress over her arm, which she spread upon the bed in all its frail glory.

“Hullo!” Tony said.

“It’s my damnedest,” Francesca said. “You remember you told me to do my damnedest—Voilà!”

They both laughed; Mathilde, with that rare glance of happiness a really good maid bestows on a really good mistress, evincing approval and satisfaction, not utterly uninfluenced by the presence of the master, went out.

Silence again.

Francesca felt her heart begin to beat rather fast as she waited; she said at last, a little tremulously:

“Darling, what is it?”

She leant forward; she had finished doing her hair, she held out a hand to Tony.

"What's what?" he asked defensively.

Francesca forced a little laugh.

"Tony, of what are you thinking?"

"At that moment I happened to be thinking of that kid Dolores. Lucky we were in the river to-day."

He rose and stretched.

"I'll go and change, and I must have a look at the cellar with Monsieur le patron; this is a celebration dinner!"

It was at least celebrated by excellent wine; and the good Mathilde, when she had finished Francesca, had exclaimed at the beauty of "miladi," but nevertheless, the dinner lacked gaiety.

And after dinner—irony of fate—the waiter came to tell them two gypsies were going to sing on the veranda that night; their Excellencies would be there to enjoy it?

Of course the gypsies were the father and mother of Dolores, and of course she slept beside them whilst they sang and played.

Tony's listlessness had vanished; he went out and talked with them, and bent over Dolores, who slept on. Francesca could hear the man Pedro talking of poverty, his big family, the hardships they all endured. . . .

She called to Tony that she was going up; it was

still early, but she felt tired out by the strain of those last hours.

In her room she sat in darkness by the window, the sound of the guitar came to her faintly and the echo of Pedro's voice—young, ardent, gay—as he sang to its music.

It was a perfect night, a night of radiant stars and deep, soft darkness, of a thousand perfumes, and a cool, little wind to carry them about like invisible, enchanting flowers.

The loveliness made Francesca wince inwardly; it intensified by its contrast with her own outlook, the sadness in her heart; loveliness was for happy people, people at peace with their world.

And she was so far from that, and near only in this moment to suffering and struggle. She could not urge Tony to adopt this child despite the dumb appeal of his eyes, the "waiting" which she sensed in his attitude; she could not.

And then, perversely, quite suddenly, she encouraged the false note: "Perhaps Tony did not really care, was not genuinely interested?"

She clasped her hands together so closely that the rings bruised her fingers.

It would mean a change in their life together; it would mean a severance—and she could be, she knew, jealous of Tony.

She *would* be—she met the acknowledgment with a faint flush and a quick stab of the heart. For her jealousy would not be so much for herself, in direct

connexion with Tony's love for her, his dependence on her for his happiness, as it would be for that undying memory they shared, which their love for each other had first called into being.

Oh, how could, how could he want this child—when he remembered?

And before her mental gaze there rose the vision of Tony and herself. He had come in and found her, when she had just got better, and had been up for the first time, kneeling beside the box of lovely tiny clothes, and he had knelt down beside her and gathered her up in his arms and kissed away her tears.

How *could* he want to do this thing?

And how easily men forgot! What a little while they suffered, really!

The tears Tony had kissed away seemed to have returned to her keeping now, and they fell in her heart. Below in the scented darkness the rapid yet pretty notes of the guitar still sounded; Pedro still sang of love and sorrow in the voice of youth.

Francesca got up and began to walk about the room. What an impossible situation it was, really! And it had risen in one half-hour, from a half-careless remark, from sheer chance. And it would alter their lives irrevocably.

The door opened gently; Tony looked in.

"Hullo! Not asleep?"

"No, I can't sleep."

He crossed to her.

"Anything wrong?"

Francesca answered with another question:

"Have the gypsies gone?"

"Oh yes, rather—at least, the mother and our rescue, Señorita Dolores Juana—they've gone. Pedro, the father's still doing his stunt."

"You didn't stay when the others left?"

"No."

He wandered about irresolutely; a big, solid, well-shaped being in the dimness, the outline of his shoulders clearly cut against the window space as he stood there, looking out.

His very silence seemed irritatingly dear at this moment, expressing, as it seemed to do, strength, and yet making Francesca intensely aware of the futility of strength at such a juncture.

The idea came to her that if Tony simply turned round and said, as he would say in his speech:

". . . Look here, old girl! I want to have that kid; I think it's the jolliest little beggar, and I vote we go down and fix it all to-morrow." . . . that she would feel it all so much easier; his directness would cut away so much of that growth in her soul which she felt to be morbid concerning this matter.

But Tony said nothing; and at last, going to him and slipping a hand into his, Francesca said:

"Did Maria and Pedro discuss our taking their baby from them, adopting her, by any chance?"

"Oh, I dunno! They talk a lot, those sort of people, y'know. Perhaps they don't mean half of it!

Giving up a child isn't a very light sort of thing to settle about in five minutes."

"No, I know, darling, but—supposing they do consent—why shouldn't we?"

She felt him start; his voice was troubled yet eager, as he said:

"Look here—what d'you really feel about it, Fay? What 'ud you really like? I don't mind saying I was rather taken with the little kid—and then rescuing her and all that—saving her life. I suppose that gives one a feeling of a bit of a claim, but I don't want anything you don't absolutely agree to. It rests with you—I—we——"

He stopped irresolutely, and there was a little silence.

"I know," Francesca said, "you did rescue her, as you say, and if these peasants are really anxious to be rid of the poor little thing—if you really feel you would like to do this, if you would be happy about it——"

Her voice trailed off; she could not go on speaking just then; the effort to make it all as easy as possible for Tony had cost her her self-control.

Tony did not notice; he began to discuss the affair carefully and thoroughly, showing thereby how much thought he had already given to it.

Francesca listened.

How right she had been, how deadly right!

She listened and suggested as Tony elaborated his idea; outside it had grown very still. Pedro had

gone, the hotel was at peace for the night ; suddenly, in the silence, a bird called, waking from its sleep ; another brief silence, then the tender, anxious call came again.

It seemed to Francesca like a whisper from the night ten years before, calling, calling to her heart to answer.

She forgot to listen to Tony ; she could only remember that on that other evening, in the ivy outside the house where they had gone on their wedding-day, a bird had stirred and called. She had been waiting for Tony to come to her, and in this hour she could recall how, at the faint sound of the thrush stirring in the leaves, she had started, and how madly her heart had beaten, supposing it to be Tony.

She had leant far out of the window, looking deep into the ivy, and the scent, it had seemed to her, of surely the most wonderful roses in all the world had drifted up to her.

And she had been drawn back into Tony's arms ; he had been waiting behind her.

Together they had stood, his arms about her, looking together into the loveliness of the night—a night like this one—as fair, as wonderfully, intimately dark ; but then Tony had kissed and kissed her hair as she had leant back against him, and he had called it, in a passionate whisper, a “perfumed crown”—“darling, heavenly stuff to kiss!”

Ten years before.

His voice broke through her memories.

"It's up to you, you must decide."

She caught his hand in hers.

"Tony, d'you remember this night ten years ago?"

"Of course I do," he said quietly.

"It was all rather wonderful, wasn't it? It's rather—rather a pity, isn't it (how people would scoff at me for being sentimental, if they knew), but it's rather tragic, don't you think, that all that wonderfulness goes so soon—and is forgotten?"

"It's not forgotten," Tony said, "only—things replace—it's that, I think—they grow. I dunno, I can't put things much, as you know, but it seems to me that, though marriage is pretty wonderful and all that, just living together day by day, and feeling life's good because you do, is wonderful, too. Stacks of times I look at you and feel proud of you, or glad about you, or a dozen other things, because you're my wife and you love me. That seems pretty good to me, too."

"Oh, Tony!" Francesca whispered. She drew his arm around her and leant her head back against his shoulder.

He kissed her hair.

"How ripping it smells, Fay. What stuff d'you put on it?"

"Oh, scent. I forget what it's called. Tony, I love you."

He gave a deep sigh above her bent head. Francesca waited a moment, then went on speaking swiftly.

“And, Tony, I think—I mean I have decided, and I want us to give one another Dolores for a tenth wedding present. Don’t you think it’s rather a lovely idea?”

She was trying to smile in the darkness; the effort was visible in her voice.

Tony’s arm tightened about her.

“Fay, d’you mean it?”

And without waiting for her assurance, he hurried on:

“You don’t *mind*—you’re sure?”

She had known he must ask that question; she said quickly:

“Darling, no.”

He released her and seemed to square back his shoulders; the decision had been given, suspense was over; confession waited on relief.

“I’ve thought of it often before,” he said slowly, “but I was afraid—I mean I thought you’d be so hurt, perhaps. Shows how little one ever knows about anyone else, what? For look at us now!”

“Yes, look at us now,” Francesca echoed.

A clock chimed far away; the notes fell softly and clearly into the stillness.

“Getting late,” Tony murmured.

“You’ll have to maid me,” Francesca said. Life had returned to extreme normality; the sacrifice

had been made and never realized; things were "going on" as usual, that chief necessity for the average man.

Tony fumbled with the hooks of the white and silver dress, cursing in a quiet, absorbed way under his breath; at last he had finished his labours, and he heaved a portentous sigh of gratitude.

"I'll cut off now—shan't be long. Feel a bit tired to-night!"

He vanished into his own room, and Francesca could hear the sound of much running water and brushes in mutual operation; then Tony reappeared, looking very clean and sleepy.

"Rather a great day?" he asked. "It's not every five minutes or every anniversary of one's wedding-day one adopts a baby! I say, we ought to make this her birthday with us. Rather a scheme. Sleepy, old lady?"

Perhaps Francesca's answer was so gentle, it seemed sad; perhaps, dimly, a very faint glimmering of the fact that such a thing as hurtness existed in the world came to Tony. Of course Fay had said everything was all right, so of course it was; still, women were rather rum, difficult to get at. . . . Perhaps Fay had been remembering, poor little darling!

He slid an arm about his beautiful wife.

"Happy, aren't you, darling?"

"Of course."

She stroked his thick mat of hair, released from its durance vile of extreme tidiness during the day.

"What made you ask?"

"Oh, I dunno. It's the end of our anniversary, after all."

"Yes, I know."

He waited. Francesca did not speak again; she was tired, of course; it *had* been a long day.

He freed his arm.

"Good night, old girl."

"Good night, darling."

When he was quite asleep, beyond the power of disturbance, Francesca got up and knelt beside the window.

An extraordinary vivid kaleidoscope of her life and Tony's—since their marriage flashed before her as she knelt . . . the usual gay, full, interested life of their set. . . . Tony and she had raced and hunted, danced and visited; he had seemed so "complete" in his outlook, so serenely pleased, content, and, all the while, behind his apparently happy occupation, there had been this secret overshadowing thought, this innermost hope of which she had known nothing, which Tony had felt to be too sacred to tell her, or had trusted her love for him so little, he had not risked doing so.

Perhaps that hurt in this hour more than the fulfilment of his longing made possible by her sacrifice; at least, there, her action had bound them closer, but Tony's silence—a silence of years, a cherished growth of his very soul, guarded so jealously—had wounded her deeply. She realized, staring out into

the soft night, how very, very little, in the end, one human being knew of another, how endlessly lonely even the closest lives were; it was possible, and therein lay a deadening irony, to share a man's life, his every action almost, his every interest, to live with him as himself, bound by a genuine love on either side, and yet know him so little that a fundamental outlook on a matter of most vital importance could be held by him without his desire to share it.

And again that stark wonder which the discovery of any distinctive, new quality in the character of those we love can wake in us, swept over Francesca.

She was afraid of this loneliness of herself, which seemed so suddenly to have been made visible to her by Tony's silence, and again by the quick, jerky confession he had poured out to her—and so much, oh! so much, by the advent of Dolores.

She felt, on this point, an indescribable emotion, which held jealousy and nobility and dread, and longing and bitterness and an infinite sorrow in its depths; she knew, she had known, even in that fleeting exultation which a sacrifice made for someone you love wakes in you, that she would suffer watching Tony with Dolores, that her loveliest and most poignant memory would be changed into bitterness now, and that yet she would want Tony to be happy. It amazed her, too, to find how little her boasted, casual acceptance of the inevitable, a tenet of her creed, availed her now in the first real trial of her life; her gay cynicism fell from her like a useless,

too frail wrap, swept away by a tempest, her slogan :

“ Oh, of course one accepts the things one must; it's the easiest and wisest thing to do!” seemed a string of cheap and foolish words; one did *not* accept wisely or easily, because pain, resentment, were both futile.

The dawn was breaking in the east, a spear of pearl cut between the bars of darkling violet, the winding, uneven street became dimly visible, the new day had come.

Francesca rose wearily, and went to the dressing-table to spray her hands; she caught a pale glimpse of herself in the mirror.

Had it been only yesterday she had seemed so young, so one with golden life and golden roses?

They bloomed now, whitely, in a tall vase beside her.

She looked at them with the first tears which had come to her shining in her eyes.

CHAPTER II

"Le coeur a des raisons que la raison ne connait pas."

WITHIN a week Dolores Juana Estival, aged two years and one month, a member of the Holy Roman Church, and a citizeness of the Spanish kingdom, had become the legal possession of Tony and Francesca, and the parents of Dolores Juana had become the legal possessors of a portable bank, and felt themselves to be happily free from an encumbrance.

Dolores accepted the change in her life and surroundings philosophically; she left the parental tent seated between Tony and Francesca; and Tony, Francesca noted with a little, bleak smile, drove very slowly in order that Dolores might see all that there was to be seen in the way of passers-by, or flowering trees, or oxen.

Francesca could have cursed and cried, laughed and derided as she sat in infinite loneliness that sunlit afternoon and watched Tony's patience, his unaffected pleasure in Dolores' unsteady but so attractive "walk," her solemn wonder at finding herself defeated by the ground she had a moment before trampled upon in triumph. He had gone with Francesca to engage a nurse, and he had talked

with her in his bad, vigorous Spanish about Dolores, laughing at his mistakes, but nevertheless, managing to drive home any point he wished to emphasize.

As he talked, Francesca had marvelled, for he knew his subject; and again, at that realization, a sword had turned in her heart.

Dolores, her curls brushed and bobbing every moment, her cheeks carnation-pink with excitement, her green eyes like clear pools lit by sheer sunshine, danced on Tony's knee, her short, fluffy skirts billowing out like tiny, white waves about her.

The car had been requisitioned for days for her shopping; Tony had contributed a pair of emerald green shoes, and a little jade necklace.

"I never knew you had such decorative instincts!" Francesca told him.

"I haven't; Doro has such green eyes, that's all," he said with a grin.

He had chosen "Doro" as a name, and Emilia, the nurse, and Francesca had received this ultimatum with quiescence.

At any rate, Francesca owned to herself, Doro paid for dressing, for the meticulous care to which she was now subjected; she was a really lovely thing and, as Tony constantly repeated, "When she smiles! . . ." Imagination was left to cope with a marvel so enchanting!

As if she understood, Doro kept the smile almost

exclusively for Tony; Tony was her god, and sky, her need and dream.

She said his name first, her only English word; she knew his voice, his step, and she swarmed up him the moment he sat down, clutching a flannelled knee in deadly seriousness, whilst she stood with both emerald shod feet on one of Tony's, and pulled herself higher till she stood upright, gripping the lapels of his coat, her face near to his, the enchanting smile breaking out at the glorious triumph of her progress.

And Tony would say under his breath:

"You little ripper, you stunning little kid!"

He did not lavish many endearments on Doro in Francesca's hearing; he might be "thick," "heavy," as has been stated, but if he was also (as had been hinted by Francesca's friends) "one-ideaed," sometimes that single instance of imagination was extremely tactful; Francesca and he had never discussed the question of her affection for Doro, yet, though Francesca had been entirely sweet about getting the child things, seeing to her welfare, and though she called her "Darling," Tony knew that an imitative effort on his part would not be welcome. So Doro remained unendeared in public, and Tony made up for it, when he could, in private.

He had few chances; Francesca was generally present, but he had one amazing gorgeous afternoon when he drove Doro out alone in the car,

whilst Francesca disposed, if she could, of a headache, and encouraged a siesta.

Emilia pleaded to go; not that she loved the car, but that she loved Dolores; the car, in an access of self-abandonment, she had termed "a machine of the evil one," having driven in it when Tony had felt inclined to pace, and having never forgotten that memorable and devastating experience.

The mere idea of her beloved baby driving forth to certain danger, to her probable death, in Emilia's opinion, was not to be endured without violent protest.

But Tony was adamant, and at last, having besought every saint she could remember to keep an eye on her baby and avert the evil eye from the car, Emilia watched the Rolls disappear in a cloud of dust, and returned to a broken siesta on the veranda, where, luckily, Miguel, the first waiter, was also resting from his labours, and could help to beguile sorrow from the mind by means of picked tunes played upon the mandolin and accompanied by glances, long, expressive and love-lorn.

Tony and Dolores meanwhile drove together in easy silence; Dolores had on a white muslin dress, and a large white shawl which stood up in a peak at the back of her white bonnet, which was of stout corded silk, and had a ruffle round the face.

"Like it?" Tony inquired at length, some ten miles having ticked off the speedometer; he trans-

lated his speech into Dolores' native tongue, and she smiled.

Tony put an arm round all the sweet whiteness, and Doro laughed, she stretched up, and laid a hand on the huge steering wheel and laughed again, so Tony lifted her on his knee and Doro drove.

It was hot and still and peaceful, and at last, having noticed a garden which seemed to belong to an untenanted house, Tony ran the car back, and, holding Doro on one arm, went in at the rusty iron gate to investigate.

The house—a square, pink-washed building, the pink faded to a pale lemon colour in many places, its black and white roof glittering in the sunshine—stood back, raised upon two small terraces. It appeared utterly deserted, and indeed the cobbled paths were nearly hidden beneath their growth of rank grass and groundsel.

But the terraces were cascades of loveliness, from which roses tumbled in velvety waves of gorgeous deep red, and sheerest, most delicate pink.

Tony took out his pipe, and sat down beneath an orange tree.

It was infinitely peaceful here; there seemed to be only sunshine, and the nearness of the bees, and roses in the world.

“We'll come here often,” he said to Doro, “you and I, d'you see? It's our enchanted garden; we discovered it.”

He looked gravely at Doro, who looked back with that wide, satisfying look of childhood when it loves and trusts.

Tony had none of that reputed shyness, dis-ease of mind, which is popularly supposed to beset a man at the mere nearness of a baby; he had no *gêne* whatever where children were concerned; *tout court* he belonged to that class of men which likes children, dogs and horses, because it understands them, a class whose adjectives are limited, but their hearts large.

He was planning all sorts of things for Doro, as she industriously rolled one orange after another between his feet, white goal-posts of obliging extension into which Doro "shot" with surprising regularity when she sat close to the right foot and pushed the orange with both hands.

This manœuvre Tony criticized, as became one of the sporting patrons of the British Empire. He instructed Doro in the mysteries of a "foul," and urged her to shoot a little farther off, thus introducing more dash into the game.

Doro agreed instantly; she sat down with a comfortable bump opposite Tony at a distance of two yards, and proceeded to kick off.

"Good egg," Tony said judicially, when a stout orange, by pure chance, rolled home at last; "keep it up, old lady."

They played absorbedly, both being of that temperament which has received biblical mention in

the form of an adjuration, which advice applied to trade crises to-day, should prove of inestimable value to the output, if the workers could accept it!

Doro and Tony pursued their labour with their feet in place of hands, as originally directed, but the result was satisfactory.

"I'll teach you cricket later on," Tony volunteered as the game progressed; "and to ride, and shoot, and, above all, fish, my dear."

He removed his pipe from between his teeth in order to give Doro a fair and unimpeded statement on this vital matter.

"Fishin' is *the* sport, Doro. To go out early, and stand and watch the deep swirl of quiet water, to wait and think, and then do it all over again in a world to yourself, where you can feel there's room, where you can breathe at peace. And then home in the evening through the thick, soft grass with the shadows creeping over the hills and the smell of crushed leaves and wood fires burnin'; there's a lot in fishing, baby, take it from me."

Doro apparently "took" it, for she said slowly and distinctly, as one repeats a hallowed word: "Fish."

To Tony's ardent, Waltonian soul, this was sheer joy; he felt this would be an anecdote for all time to prove conclusively the superlative wisdom of Doro, and they passed towards the car in radiant mood.

Within view of the gate Tony halted abruptly, and as he did so a voice hailed him languidly:

“Hullo, Rex! At last. I knew the car, of course; been stalking you, as a matter of fact. Why—what——”

There was a pause, during which Tony lifted Doro and walked out of the garden.

He said, meeting the amused, amazed stare of the young man in the second car:

“We’ve adopted Doro. Doro, this is your Uncle Pan.”

Pasquale Greville, after one swift glance at Tony’s face, bent over Doro’s hand and raised it with absurd empressment to his lips. As he lifted his head he said lightly:

“’Pon my soul, Rex, your taste is excellent! Congratulations indeed!”

Tony grunted non-committally; then he said:

“Why are you here? I thought you said in your note to Fay it was impossible to obtain leave; that you had some special stunt on?”

“Oh, yes, but that is quite over; the affair has died out. They always do in Madrid. We live on the verge of death by reason of our diplomatic frenzy over some detail, and behold, the next day, or at tea-time the same day, it is over! This particular affair shrivelled like tissue paper in a flame. One becomes inured to an enormous expenditure of energy over nothing after a time and remains impassive. Then one obtains leave, for the Powers believe impassiveness to be exhaustion due to forced labour.

I have never admired economy, but always its result!"

He gave a little laugh at his own words, and Tony inquired unsmilingly: "Your car?" his eyes on the scarlet racer.

"Oh, no; Desanges lent it me."

He nodded to the chauffeur at the wheel and told him in excellent Spanish to crank up.

"You can go back to the hotel. I am returning in the other car."

"See Fay at the hotel?" Tony inquired next.

"No, her maid said she was asleep, but a very voluble Cordovan, with excellent teeth and pencil-line eyebrows, told me you had gone off in the car. I was rather surprised at her knowledge, knowing your views; but I see, upon reflection, that the girl really has a position in your menage—necessitated, one supposes, by my niece's advent."

Tony said jerkily:

"I rescued Doro, and then I—we—er—we simply decided to adopt her."

"Excellent idea, since she is quite beautiful."

Tony thawed a little at this praise. Pasquale and he had never, as he phrased it to himself, quite "hit it." Charles and he were differently bound editions of each other; but Pasquale, who was ten years younger, and had been the only child of their father's second marriage, had never fitted into the perfect circle. Yet, for the life of him, Tony could not have said why he had this detached feeling about

Pasquale, why Charles and he rarely talked of him, and why Pasquale seemed to lead a life apart.

He had chosen to go into the Diplomatic, and Madrid had been his first post; it had been at his instigation that the Rexfords had decided to motor in Spain; they had all met in Paris, by chance, and Pasquale had seemed, for once, actually enthusiastic about something, and the something had been Cordova.

“It has mystery; it holds the past between the dry palms of its dark hands,” he had said.

Tony, in his more acute moments, had wondered whether Pasquale had not the poetic instinct; rather, let us say, he had feared this catastrophe, and always dreaded secretly to receive tangible proof thereof, specially when Pasquale “enthused.”

Of course, it had been realized very early in the Rexford home that “Pasquale” as a name was impossible; the Rexford tradition, as exemplified in the two elder sons, decreed all things foreign to be somewhat “high falutin’”; as a compromise, and partly because Pasquale used the word himself, he had been nicknamed “Pan.”

By chance, therefore—certainly from no far vision on the part of Tony or Charles—they gave their small half-brother a name whose appositeness, later in his life, could not be gainsaid.

Another quietly mournful outlook of Tony’s was concerned with Pasquale’s undeniable beauty; Tony considered it almost distressing; it seemed

unmanly of Pasquale to be really beautiful, and odd and unnecessary that any member of decent family should be so dowered. One divine mercy alone had been vouchsafed to him in this connexion: Pasquale was not conceited, or at least, if he was, he had sufficient subtlety to disguise the fact.

Dimly, Tony realized Pasquale was "damn clever," and that also disquieted him; he could not fathom this brilliant-eyed, brilliant-brained young brother at all, with his deliberately exotic outlook, his barbaric strength, and his pose of extreme languidness about everyone and everything.

"Comes of bein' foreign," Tony told himself, finding therein a balm for his own perplexity of mind. "It's his Hungarian mother."

It would have been a source of comfort to Tony if Pasquale's mother had been Austrian; it seemed a less remote, less wild, and altogether better country to have sprung from.

She had died shortly after his father, who had idolized her and, also true to type, idealized her too, a fortunate combination of adoration, and one which adds enormously to the comfort and peace of life for both people concerned.

Tony and his stepmother had "got on," inasmuch that both had tacitly and unobtrusively avoided the other; after his mother's death Tony had made over her fortune to her son.

He imagined now that Pasquale's surprise visit was probably due to money shortage, but he minded

that very little; he was a generous soul, and the "clan-protective" instinct stood him in good stead here.

Pasquale had lifted Doro on to his knee and was teasing her in Spanish, to which she responded with complete self-possession.

Both Doro and he smiled at Tony at the same moment, and he was struck by the brilliance of their smiles, the quick flash of Pasquale's golden hazel eyes, the translucent sweetness of Doro's.

He found himself thinking, "What ripping children Pan'll have"; aloud he said:

"Why don't you marry, Pan?"

"Why should one?" Pasquale answered evenly. "At twenty-five anyway? Vaut pas la peine, my dear!"

"Seems a pity not to," Tony said. "Be better for you than your type of life."

Pasquale made a little grimace over Doro's head, his clear-cut lips curved downwards for a moment, his eyes held a faintly contemptuous look.

With that needle-like intuition of some "pointed" minds which goes unerringly to the very subject the listener wishes to avoid, he asked in retaliation:

"How exactly does Francesca feel about Doro?"

Tony bristled defensively.

"How d'you mean, how exactly does she feel about it?" he asked.

"Oh! it occurred to me that it must be rather difficult, one would think, to accept such a condi-

tion, even when it means so lovely a thing, and not feel something. She was most awfully cut up when her accident happened, wasn't she?"

Tony said rather heavily:

"Fay suggested our adopting Doro."

Pasquale smiled again, this time with a mixture of admiration and derision.

"Oh, I knew that; I was sure it would be she," he agreed lightly.

They drove the rest of the way in silence; on the veranda Francesca was waiting for them; she waved to them gaily.

Pasquale noticed the Cordovan girl with the pencil-line eyebrows was just behind her, and that Francesca gave her directions.

He therefore was quite ready to deliver Doro into the arms held up for her, and Tony descended unencumbered from the car.

Between Pasquale and Francesca a friendship had always existed; his good looks must have appealed to any lover of beauty; the modelling of his head alone, with its darkly shining cap of thick hair, was perfect, and he had, moreover, the build, slender yet so suggestive of splendid strength, of an athlete, and, coupled with it, great height.

Women sighed at him, after him, for him, and to his great amusement and secret satisfaction. He was spoilt and he enjoyed it.

"Everyone ought to be," so he declared; "it does them good."

“ Whatever direct action results from this course, I should feel inclined to lay heavy odds against its being one connected with virtue!” Francesca laughed at him.

He took off his soft, white hat now and greeted her, kissing first one hand and then the other. With Francesca he was perhaps more boyish, more genuine than with any other woman; he was fond of her, he had never dreamt of being in love with her, so that he was able to like her and really appreciate her.

To-day he was intensely sorry for her; all the sleeping chivalry of his nature, so long smothered by the weight of his entirely selfish code of life, was stirred.

His intuition told him at once that she had suffered, no less than the faint violet stains beneath her charming dark eyes.

He leant back against one of the wooden pillars of the veranda, and found Francesca a wholly attractive being to watch. Her extreme slenderness, concealed, yet beautifully suggested, by her thin white frock, silhouetted against the riot of pink geraniums, which seemed to throw a rose light on to her palely golden hair, delighted him; she possessed, moreover, to a great degree that inexplicable, almost indescribable power of suggesting at once allure and reserve.

Pasquale thought to himself: “ She is the sort

of woman men want to fall in love with, and other women envy."

To-day all that effect was there, but it was as if it gleamed through a shadow.

"She is deadly unhappy," Pasquale told himself, and he would have liked in that instant to put his arms about her and say: "Look here, I know. And I'm most awfully sorry, Fay."

But he was quite aware that Francesca would laugh at him, stroke his hair amusedly and make him feel abominably self-conscious.

As it was, he laughed at himself for having let sentiment guide him so dangerously. His great effort, as he conceived at the moment, was to enjoy without regret and to avoid without reproach.

So he said now, lightly:

"I like your baby, Francesca, and you would of course choose one with looks. She has the advantage, too, of getting 'em, as it were, retail! One cannot argue at least whose eyes she has, or which side of the family invented her nose!"

He went on talking amusingly of Madrid; he was keen, too, on the Rexfords returning with him, and then, after a brief stay, driving on to Biarritz, "all silver sea-spray, and baccarat, and freesias, and the most exciting cocktails, my dears. You must come!"

Tony, who hated being called "my dear," considering its application to himself to be one of those peculiarly mosquito-like affronts which it was im-

possible to resent openly without appearing foolish, now lit a pipe and maintained silence.

"Look thou not down, but up," Pasquale adjured him with languid amusement.

"Oh, we'll go if you like," Tony said ungraciously, his eyes on Francesca.

"Then that is settled," Pasquale suggested, watching Tony's face between his thick lashes. He was as impersonally angry with Tony as his type of nature would allow him to be, on Francesca's account.

In his heart there burned no steady flame of whitely protective passion, to him "Hurstpoint" was merely a place he had always known, which Tony had, since his succession, improved rather pleasantly, but he understood Francesca's outlook extraordinarily well, and Tony's not at all, and for the nth time he asked himself, with a faint shrug of his shoulders, why clever women ever married stupid men? Or why, having married them, they did not order their lives by their own chosen direction?

Love, embodying selflessness, had never entered into Pasquale's scheme of things; one wanted, one obtained, one's own expression of affection was necessarily regulated by the offering it received.

He walked alone with Francesca in the old garden; it was very late, they had not begun to dine until nine, and now the nightingales were singing and the air held a wine-like intoxication of perfume.

elusive, infinitely alluring; a wind like a caress, so soft, so cool, so fragrant, lifted the close leaves of the cypress trees, and once, it was so still, a rose broke and its petals fell, each distinctly, on to the sun-burnt earth.

It was a night when longing wakes in the heart, causeless perhaps, unidentified with any real thought or hope, save just the wish that such loveliness might never die, that one's heart might never miss its poignant, heavenly-sweet appeal; it was a night when unhappiness is so much more unhappy than it has been by day, when contrast forces it into more vivid being, and makes all the loveliness as well hurt and ache in the wound which throbs so in one's heart.

Francesca sought desperately to escape from herself. Tony had vanished after dinner; she had known where he had gone, of course, but she had thought he would soon join Pasquale and herself in the garden.

He had not come.

A week ago, he would have walked beside her, slid an arm in hers, and loved the loveliness with her.

He might be inarticulate, but Francesca heard the words he never said.

And suddenly Pasquale's youth, his sheer joy of living, lashed across the wound in her heart.

Ordinarily, his pose was indifference to all things, or the cultivation of a taste so eclectic, nothing

really satisfied; but to-night the magic of the scented darkness stripped him of his diseased fastidiousness, and made him, for the moment, a normal being. He slid a quick hand through Francesca's arm.

"It is divine, all of it, isn't it? One's pagan self is called back to the burning past by a night like this. Simply to be alive with all the world before one, all of time, to dream in, love in, compete in! Francesca, d'you know, I feel to-night as if each star were mine to fling over the edge of all the skies, if I so wanted. I feel——" He stopped as suddenly as he had spoken, and added, his mind divining hers: "Whilst you feel that everything is utterly wrong—out of the scheme of things——"

Francesca gave a little low laugh.

"My dear boy, it isn't any good feeling anything more about it. It has happened, you see. I made it happen. I should have been a quite worthless being if I had not done so, and I should be a coward and fool if I regretted a decent action. I am neither. I am simply, rather contemptibly, quite humanly, a jealous woman, whose jealousy is redeemed a little by the fact that I try to smile at myself when I do not despise my own idiocy!"

"Why did you do it?" Pasquale asked with hard curiosity.

Francesca laughed again.

"Why? Oh, for a reason you will scarcely understand, you are too youthfully clever still, too old

for your own heart, my dear! Because I love Tony, because I want him to love me, because he is so much my small son, as well as my husband, and because he isn't clever, and he has no use, therefore, for substitutions, and cannot understand 'instead of' for the words 'of course'; and because all these things being so, he must have what he wants if I can give it him. I could give him Doro, you see, though I struggled not to. Then he defeated me because he fought on my side! I was thinking only of myself, and he thought of me, too."

"Or you imagined he did," Pasquale interpolated.

"My dear, whatever one believes is true when one loves, as long as one *does* believe it, that belief makes it true. But, if you like, I chose to believe Tony considered me, and so I considered him—we revolved in a beneficent circle, from which there was no outlet unless I forced one. It was a question: why should two people be unhappy or one quite happy? And I abhor foolish waste. So here we are now, two of us perfectly happy, the third, myself, if not happy, at least good—a state which should bring its own reward, and never does, I have noticed, probably because one feels such exercise *should* be recompensed, thereby robbing the action of its value! I seem, too, to be in rather the position of those dowered ones who are told, because they have, they *shall* have!—a most perverse form of generosity it seems to me, and merely another method of chastisement; suggesting to my

profound mind, in this instance, the action of those Christmas friends who will give you presents to please themselves, quite irrespective of what they know you want—and then you have to seem gratified! Pasquale, d'you know, I feel sometimes as I think a shipwrecked person must do, who finds a boat on his desert island, and then discovers it has no oars, nor he the power to fashion any! Tony and I both wanted a child so much; we felt, I think, following up my rather poor metaphor, that a child would help us to push out into the life off the island where we had become rather narrowed perhaps. Now the child is there, and I don't know what to do, and my lack of skill in helping defeats Tony's power as well."

"I understand," Pasquale said quickly, "and Tony's so—forward, shall we say, about this matter because he has not much vision. It's a deuce of a risk, for one thing, I should imagine, adopting a child like Doro. How on earth can one foresee how she may develop?"

It was obvious he obtained a certain trite satisfaction from the contemplation of Tony's probable disappointment.

"There is such a thing as reversion to type," he added.

Francesca felt how very far away from her he was, despite his evident desire to comfort; he saw only one crude issue; he visioned for her one consolation for her bitterness—Tony's discomfiture—

and, at once, that married loyalty which is so incomprehensible to any outside person, a loyalty which will maintain itself perversely under the most amazing conditions, asserted itself.

“Oh, no, that sort of thing will not happen,” she said quietly, “environment is ‘nine-tenths of this sort of battle—sufficiently early environment, bien entendu—and we have that advantage, you will own, wholly on our side. My dear, look at the world we know ourselves; if you need examples I could point to men and women whom we both know now, to whom environment has meant everything, whom environment has made. I grant you they have brains—the women more markedly than the men, for their sense of values is so much more definitely social—and, after all, as long as a man makes good, one is apt to tolerate him easily. But one ranks women differently, and really their response to environment is amazing. I know a woman who is legitimately famous for her wit, her charm, her general ‘flair’ for all that is decorative, and, in a limited sense, ‘right’ in life. Her nearest relatives are of that class from which Doro springs; her father made money; he had vision; he married a gently-bred woman, and the daughter had initiative and one other great asset, the gift of differentiation; she could choose, she did; she ‘chose’ the right husband, and cultivated various eclectic tastes and trained them. Expensive tastes, the right kind, give a cachet of exclusiveness! Quite a number of

people have attained eminence through a hobby; it is one of the dearest but wisest forms of social imposition! Only it must be a rare taste. This woman collected something and made it her hobby, as she made her children, by dint of study, the real thing. The only detail she overdoes, and it is quite a good thing to overdo in her case, is her extreme indifference to all so-called class distinction. No woman with any position ever really possesses this indifference. One pretends to do so—and grades one's parties! Or one gives an olla podrida and is furious at the wrong people being mentioned as being present! Honestly, Pan, what snobs we are, every one of us!"

"Yes. Adds a flavour to life. Nothing is so depressing as universal anything; haven't you noticed that? And snobbishness, even if it is cheap, makes for gaiety! If one hadn't got it, life would be precious dull. And it's so pleasant to feel superior, and it's amusing, too, when you know that you're feeling superior about a thing you couldn't possibly help, anyway! You're amused both ways then: by the other lesser-gifted souls who value what you can't help having, and with yourselves for valuing their appreciation!"

Tony's voice called out of the soft darkness.

"Here," Francesca answered.

He came towards them slowly, his cigar-end looking like a tiny, travelling crimson star.

"What have you two been discussing?"

"Social values," Francesca said with a little laugh.

"And what are they?"

"Things that only the people who don't need them ever have, really," Pasquale said derisively.

Tony was standing still: he said now in a low voice:

"Rather good out here, Fay, what? By Jove, the honeysuckle smells like an English lane!"

"There's glory for you," Pasquale said with light derisiveness, apostrophizing the honeysuckle; "you smell like a nice, neat English lane where Reuben and his lass walk heavily, his earth-stained, horny-hand about her well-steeled waist, and where the stars shine down demurely! Here we have only a flood of passionate perfume and the stars blazing goldenly, and the very dust is shaken by Romance!"

He took out his cigarette case and chose a cigarette and shut the case with a sharp snap. Tony was on his nerves; he longed to irritate him, to jerk him from his state of fatuous baby-worship; it was absurd—and Francesca's beauty, a certain note which had trembled in her voice when she had answered Tony's call so swiftly, fed his anger inconsequently; he wanted life, all that was lovely in it, to be for him alone that night; he resented a state of things which offered him, personally, nothing.

He said deliberately, after an instant's pause:

"Where've you been all this time, Tony?"

At once Francesca began to speak; Pasquale knew she did not want the answer.

Tony's stolidness was not easily shaken.

"I went up to see if Doro was all right," he said.

"On such a night!" Francesca quoted.

"Is anything special to-night?" Tony asked anxiously.

Pasquale went off into fits of laughter; a servant passed carrying a lantern, and for the moment his beautiful, laughing face was clearly visible; he looked like a faun in the passing flash of gold, a faun delighting maliciously in his power.

CHAPTER III

"A secret between two is God's secret."

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.

BIARRITZ, despite its baccarat, its cocktails, and its freesia, was not very satisfactory. Tony did not like "large" hotel life, and just then Biarritz was crowded; he seemed to move amidst a swirl of diamonds, dresses, high laughter, endless meals.

Doro did not like it either; she saw little of Tony; she had a dull life; she said so in Spanish with a wail, and suddenly she grew pale, and all at once she was ill.

For the first time Francesca voluntarily cared for Doro; she walked with her in her arms trying to soothe her, murmuring over and over the little words of love babies understand in any language.

She had come in from a dance at the villa that Diana Arundel had taken for the season, and she had felt very tired, most inclined for bed. Tony, too, had been, as he put it, "yawning his head off" since their return to the hotel, when Emilia knocked at the door and said with frenzied gestures that "the blessed little one—the angel-baby—was ill—dying; who knew, save the good God, what was to be done?"

Without being gifted with celestial wisdom, Francesca seemed to know; she had one glimpse of Tony's face looking stupid through fear, then, putting on a peignoir, she ran to Doro's room. In her mind, as she rocked Doro, there raced a medley of memories culled years before from some little "manual" she had read with such youth and such earnestness.

"Hot water" seemed all she could remember, and she applied it, and Doro relaxed, coughed pitifully, and was better, and Francesca was conscious of a quick joy as she clasped that small figure and cuddled it down against her heart.

She walked up and down, up and down, whilst the darkness faded and the light came, when Tony tip-toed in, followed by a little, voluble doctor, who seemed to have come for the sole purpose of telling Francesca how clever she was.

When he had gone again and Francesca was sitting on the couch with Doro still sleeping, Tony came and knelt beside them. He put an arm about Francesca and leant his head for an instant against hers.

"I say, Fay, you are a ripper," he said hoarsely; "that chap, Gomez, says if you hadn't been so prompt Doro'd not have had a chance. I—I've wanted to thank you so much about—about—well, all this, adopting her and so on, but to-night——"

He waited until Doro slept in her cot, with Emilia watching fervently beside her; then, out in the

empty corridor, lit now by one long adventurous spear of golden light, he lifted Francesca in his arms.

"You're dead tired," he said.

He carried her into their room and laid her on the bed and disappeared into the bathroom, to return with a kettle and little spirit stove. He lit the stove, set on the kettle, and measured tea from Francesca's tiny silver caddy; when the water had boiled and he had made the tea, he carried Francesca's cup to her and held it to her lips.

"Come on, Sweetness, drink it up."

He had not called her that for years; it had always been rather a high-day and special term, reserved for use on great occasions, and not to be dealt with lightly or unadvisedly.

In this time of dawning, the cup of tea, Tony's large, dressing-gowned figure, his untidy mat of hair, and that last expression, seemed to Francesca to make up for all the bitter-sweetness of her gift of Doro to him; for all the self-torture and weary depression. The tea was far too strong, and it had no sugar in it, and insufficient milk; but it had, nevertheless, an Olympian flavour.

"Now go to sleep, there's a good girl," Tony said in his most fatherly-masterly-husband way.

* * * * *

They reached Hurstpoint in the early autumn, having travelled up through the chateau country very leisurely, and at once life became a series of

house-parties, of shooting by day, of much bridge and poker in the evening, and very little baby-worship indeed.

Doro appeared and disappeared, and Tony laughed at her and lost her, save for one hour in the evening before dinner, when he sneaked off to the nursery, where he generally found most of the staff, headed by old Mrs. Beadle, teaching Doro English.

She learnt with amazing quickness, just as she progressed in her walking, so that one evening she strode from her chair to Tony like a warrior going into battle.

"Topping," said Tony, and Doro added a new word to her growing list.

She had a way of choosing out from a sentence two words which expressed just what she wanted, so that Tony's invitation to "come and walk a bit," became from Doro to him the command, perfectly understood by both, "a bit," and the nursery catch-phrase, "give me a kiss, baby," an imperious "kiss."

It was Francesca, though, who introduced into nursery life a joy hitherto unknown, in the form of Nick, that redoubtable "errier boy," as Doro came to call him, and, as Nick knew himself to be, the best ratter, the pride of the yard, and the distinction of his master.

Until his fall, which, like Lucifer's, was mighty.

For Nick became the nursery dog; he was introduced into this Paradise of the fallen by Francesca; he light-heartedly accompanied her thither one

rainy afternoon when he had chanced to meet her in the hall, and, finding life dull, had decided to walk a little in her company.

He went, he was seen, he was conquered by Doro, who, ignorant of his prowess, his reputation, unaware even of the excellence and beauty of his shape, clasped him about his middle and besought him to kiss.

Nick looked into those green eyes, and for him, Antony's temptation, that of Paris, the adoration of Romeo, became a living thing; he mutely worshipped and, like Antony, forsook a warlike life to bask in luxury.

His master spoke to him rather in sorrow than in anger, but Nick was adamant; he wagged a feeble tail, but he remained with Doro.

He would take an occasional walk with Tony, when it was very wet, perhaps, and the wind was rockety, and there was a good earthy smell of leaves and rain; he would go forth then beside Tony, and Tony would talk to him like a father.

"Where's your sporting instinct now; where's your professional pride? You've let me down; you've lowered the kennel standard! The prestige of the yard!" And Nick would listen, his dark, golden eyes serene, his tail carried "just so," as one who said "Doro loves me," and to Doro he would return at a racing pace, wet and muddy paws, eager, damp nose, soaking coat, "an' all," as Mrs. Beadle was wont to say tragically, trying to clean first

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Doro, and then Nick, after one of his perambulations.

"How are the mighty fallen!" Tony would say to him, and Nick would look from happy and harmful gazing into the glowing fire and say as plainly as plainly, one ear up, "On to their paws!"

"He'll have to go to town with us later on, y'know," Tony said earnestly to Francesca; "he'll pine away if he doesn't."

They were sitting in that wonderful interval of peace, the dressing-hour, together. Mathilde had not yet come, and Tony had dressed early.

Francesca was lying on the couch before the log-fire, watching the little emerald and sapphire flames playing games together.

This sitting-room of hers at Hurstpoint was her own entirely; Tony had given her everything in it at some time or another. It opened out of their bedroom, and was furnished partly as a dressing-room and partly as a sitting-room.

On the white walls hung portraits of Tony, a photograph of Sargent's picture of Francesca, views of their homes; there was a bureau where Francesca wrote her letters, and in one corner her big dressing-table with its five-winged mirror.

Tony was mooning about happily, his pipe between his lips, sniffing scent bottles, giving his hair a last sleek down with Francesca's brushes.

Secretly, he adored the "clutter" of Francesca's dressing-table, as he called it, though he would never

have owned to such a weakness. But he did; it intrigued and amused him, just as Francesca's extremely able management of their houses aroused his silent, intense admiration. He loved the "finish" of her; her way of getting things rightly done, and yet never talking about doing them at all.

Francesca's voice came to him:

"Had a good day?"

"Rather. Gad, it was a *run*; mud up to your neck and the softest going, but a scent like a knife."

"Darling, how splendid!"

"Yes; but I say—" polishing a thumbnail which would have needed a pot of polish to make it shine, "I say, why didn't you turn out?"

Fay laughed; he turned and looked at her with a surprised smile.

"Why? Anything funny on?"

She was sitting up amongst a pile of frilly cushions, her hair was done in a loose plait, and she looked very young and gaily sweet.

Tony went across to the couch and stood beside it, looking down, his brown face still smiling.

"Any special reason?"

Fay cleared a space for him.

"Sit down and I'll tell you."

He sat down obediently.

"I suppose you were in the field until tea-time and I never knew? Some dodge like that?"

"No. I had a more important reason."

"Give it up, old lady."

"Tony, you know you said just now we'd have to take Nick with us when we went up to town in the spring?"

"As becomes a brave man, I cling to my words."

"Tony, suppose we stay down here?"

"Miss the season, darling? I shouldn't care, you know that, but I won't have you chucking everything just because I love the country."

"Oh, Tony, be like a husband in a play—or a novel. Say, 'No—oh! my darling—it cannot be.'"

She stopped with a broken little laugh, and for an instant there was a dead silence; then she put out one hand and drew Tony's cheek to her own.

"Darling, it's true, darling, it's quite, quite true—after all—after our despair—after all the specialist said! Sir Graham Duke was here this afternoon, and he's so pleased. Aren't—aren't you?"

"Pleased," Tony echoed thickly. He thrust himself a little way away from her, then caught her in his arms and held her so, her head against his shoulder, looking down at her face in the firelight; she buried it against him suddenly, and he sat on, whispering at her, kissing her hair.

The gong boomed out, Mathilde knocked. Francesca stood up.

"I've ruined your shirt, darling! Run and change it whilst I dress—I'll have to hurry."

"Just a second," Tony said; he called out in execrable French to Mathilde to wait, then he went back to Francesca.

"I say, Sweetness," he said unsteadily.

They stood so, quite near to one another, yet not even their hands touching for a moment; then he bent and kissed her mouth and left her.

CHAPTER IV

*“ I thought to find
Lips wither, listening cease, and eyes grow blind.
Yet still my eyes, where hope no longer grows,
Beyond all other eyes keep watch for those;
Mine ear awaits thy voice without my door,
And my hand seeks for thy hand evermore.”*

MONICA PEVERIL TURNBULL.

FRANCESCA'S son was born in a midsummer which seemed to swoon in a haze of amethyst-tinted heat; the day had no vitality, the very air seemed exhausted, and, as a breathless evening closed in, with the waning of the day's weary loveliness, Francesca's strength waned too.

She died at dawn, a little faint inscrutable smile on her curved lips, her last look one of love for Tony; and it seemed to him, meeting it, welcoming it, that Francesca must be getting better, it was so like her usual smile, a little mocking in some way, a little wistful, wholly sweet.

He knelt down by the side of the big bed, from which all the tinted hangings had been stripped away, and took Francesca's frail hand in his. A thousand incoherent memories flooded his tired mind, jostling one another impotently, inducing in him a sense of intolerable, irritating fatigue.

"God, if the day would come—Fay speak—they had a son—what a life-time ago it seemed since Fay had told him—they had beaten the home coverts that day—or hunted—and one night in Spain she had talked to him a little the same—before they had taken Doro—Their wedding-day—and the yellow roses a waiter had got somewhere—odd how that sort of fellow managed to get things—there had never been a woman to touch Fay. Why on all God's earth didn't some doctor or other give her something to buck her up, bring her round? She'd such vitality—that day, years ago, out hunting, after her accident——"

Her hand moved very gently in his; he lifted his haggard face; Fay was looking very clearly at him.

"You're better?" he said hoarsely.

She smiled straight into his blue eyes, tenderly, understandingly; her lips moved.

"Fay!" Tony called loudly in uncontrollable anguish.

She had always answered his every need, divining from the very first that only such love could serve him; she made a great effort now, her sweetest and last.

* * * * *

In the nursery Rex cried, and Doro considered him, then expressed her consideration in Spanish at Emilia's knee.

"But he is of a littleness," she remarked gravely, "and of a queerness." Upon further reflection his

toes alone seemed satisfactory; Doro could recognize a human resemblance there.

In point of fact Rex was like his mother; he had dark eyes and an absurd fluff of daffodil hair.

He was, rather naturally, an extremely nervous baby, and he cried incessantly, a poor, anxious little cry which wrung Emilia's soft heart entirely.

"Cry, cry, cry," said Doro, "what a baby!"

Tony saw his son for the first time a month after his birth.

He came in from an inspection of the farms, gaitered and booted; he walked heavily without any spring, and his face looked lethargic, his eyes dull.

He only came to the nursery now because there was some question of structural alteration, and it was essential he should give the matter his personal attention.

He stood just within the door, unnoticed by Emilia or Doro.

Francesca had adored redecorating the nursery; he remembered distinctly choosing the Hans Andersen tiles for the fireplace at Goodes'—they had lunched at the Berkeley that day; a dozen unimportant details, immortalized now by their dearness and very ordinariness, appealing, as perhaps only things just so little and usual *can* appeal when the opportunity of their recurrence is gone for ever, thronged his memory. Fay had been wearing gardenias that day, they had had a waiter whom they had known at the Carlton, the hold-up in Piccadilly

outside Devonshire House had been a record one—later, they had walked to Goodes', which Fay said absurdly was the best-mannered shop in town because it opened its doors to you at your approach, all of its own accord!

What tiny, ridiculous things people who were happy laughed at!

Opposite, on the glazed and gleaming tiles the little tin soldier saluted eternally.

"We must have this set—look at him and think of explaining him to Rex!" Fay had said.

Tony tramped into the room, and Doro rushed at him, arms upheld, emerald-shod feet going perilously fast.

"Up—up!" she commanded.

He lifted her in his arms, and at once she cuddled an adorable cheek to his, such a cool soft touch against his face, and an indefinable yet vaguely consoling sense of femininity seemed to float to him from a long way off, and he felt, for a second, less hideously miserable.

"Hullo, old lady!" he said to Doro, walking across towards Emilia who had risen and stood looking at him now with a mingling of hurt pride and sorrow. Tony gazed down at his son, his own face set, his mouth a bar of obstinacy.

This—for her!

Rex lifted dark lashes, and met his father's gaze gravely; he had Fay's eyes exactly, dark amber, translucent.

"Retriever eyes," Tony had called them once, rather pleased with his parallel, and he had added: "Retrieve me anyway, anyhow, from anywhere, darling!"

He went on meeting his little son's darkly golden look.

"Excellency will hold him?" Emilia suggested softly; she had transferred Rex to his father's free arm before he could reply.

Tony went on looking down, remembering painfully; he felt none of that deep stirring he had been told fathers invariably experience; only his grief stirred anew, and it never rested long.

He gave Rex back to Emilia, kissed Doro and went out.

It was a perfect day, a day of soft flooding light, of sweet freshness; autumn was coming, but like a lover to deck his love in loveliness.

The second roses bloomed in glory, the sun drew out the poignant scent from the cut box hedges.

Tony went to sit in the walled rose garden; he lit his pipe, and took off his cap, and looked round him; he knew it was a lovely day, but the days, all of them now, seemed so damn endless—all the same.

His mind worked dully, going over and over the same problem.

His life felt maimed; the influence of Fay's death was like a trap from which he could not escape; he seemed to hustle round clumsily in it, clumsily and slowly, bruising himself all the while.

He had a feeling he had been duped, treated with inscrutable unfairness.

Since the fusion of one's identity in that of another was a decree of life itself to ensure its completion, surely it was monstrous that, suddenly, for no sane reason, that fusion should be broken, dispersed for ever, one life left mangled, suffering horribly? The fact that this thing could be made every great fact grotesque and cruel.

Extraordinary too, to think that before his marriage he had been content! Now he was alone, a single life again; but, God! what a difference! His mind fumbled with its grief, which seemed to cut him off from all humanity.

Other people told him of their sympathy, and he accepted their speech with mechanical courtesy; but in his own mind he was thinking, "What do you care? You'll go back to your home, you've all your real interests waiting for you the minute you cut clear of this forced sympathy meeting! It's only a bore really having to be sorry. I used to feel like that myself about other people, so I know!"

And again, it gave him an almost jealous misery to listen to other people discussing Fay. The place irritated him, too, each room was a reminder. Fay had been one of those women, rarer than one realizes, whose imprint lives in their home.

Many women of personality lack this gift, often because decided personality induces a certain complacent little hardness; and, strange as it may seem,

you must possess a definite gentleness to be able to influence your furniture!

Fay had concentrated on her marriage, and submerged herself in it to a great extent, and her home had therefore mattered to her rather greatly.

It had been a beautiful place before she had come to it, but she had made beauty comfort too; collections of her various small delights stamped her impression in many rooms. Fay had adored boxes and fans, she had collected tiny models of shoes from every place where her own feet had rested in her travels with Tony; the boxes—lovely, delicate, miniature things of shell, and enamel and jewels—lay about, some filled with cigarettes; the fans were framed and unframed, you trod the highways and cobbled parts of Europe in tiny shoes fashioned in Bucharest, Madrid, Maggiore, or Biarritz.

Tony had sometimes bought a box and had never failed to receive delighted thanks for his thought and choice and general dearness; but since he knew nothing of boxes whatever, save as square, oblong or round effects which opened and shut, and since Fay's love for him had not rendered his discrimination sapient, the worst examples vanished discreetly.

He sat on in the rose garden; the shadows from the avenue began to stretch out across the park, a clock chimed from the stable-yard, intensifying by its solitary notes the soft mournfulness of the drooping sunset.

A feeling of utter desolation, of depression so deep it was like a smothering pall held Tony.

He had the ghastly sense: "I can't get out, I can't escape. I've got to go through with it," which seems to rob the soul of power to hope, of any vision beyond the appalling dreariness of the moment.

Life would go on, that was all.

And people talked of that as a mercy!

Nick came out, not running, but walking; he stood in a last patch of sunlight and lifted his head, then steered towards Tony.

He walked up to him and sat beside him, looking away. Tony stared down at him; there was something friendly somehow in the way his stiff white coat stuck out a little above his collar. Tony called his name; Nick's glance met his in less than a second, it seemed.

Tony's hand slid down into the friendly bit of Nick's back, into the tufty little spike of hair, and instantly Nick pressed close against his gaitered leg.

They sat together whilst the night floated from the sky, veil within veil of enshrouding deep blueness. Tony was conscious of Nick's warmth, Nick instinct with that strange sympathy which only a dog who loves you can feel.

He had a touch of rheumatism himself in a hind leg, and the grass was growing damp, but he never stirred. At last Tony got up, and Nick raised him-

self very gingerly; they began the walk back to the house.

Tony said:

“I’ve settled it then. I shall get off as soon as I can. I can’t stay here. And there’s nothing to keep me. The children will be taken good care of. To sit through the days like this—to lie awake—night after night . . . I cannot do it. It’s settled, I clear.”

CHAPTER V

"Observation is the most enduring of the pleasures of life."
GEORGE MEREDITH.

AFTER he had dined Tony ordered the car and drove over to "Pointers," a house on the extreme borders of his estate, inhabited now by his aunt, Mrs. Stafford, known to her own world and all her relatives, by her own request, as "G."

G received him in her dining-room where she was finishing dinner, as her father had finished it before her, and his before him, with extremely excellent port and walnuts.

She dismissed the butler, a little, sad-looking, withered effect, with a wave of the hand as Tony entered, and rose to greet him.

G prided herself on her freedom of speech, of life, and her knowledge of mankind.

To-night she wore an evening gown which was made to resemble a man's court suit, and became her well.

She was slight, short, and silver-haired, and she had lately had her hair cut *en brosse*, which, oddly enough, became her.

She had magnificent dark eyes, whose darkness she intensified by shadowing them with bistre

circles; for forty years she had used the same scent, which was made for her by a French firm. She greeted Tony in that style which she had affected before he had been thought of, and had seen no cause to alter since the event of his birth.

"Well, you poor devil!" she said in her extremely attractive voice, "I bet you have come to tell me you mean to clear out, and to ask me to look after things for you?"

Tony said slowly: "You're right, I have."

"Bound to," G retorted, her black eyes flashing with amusement. "Better have some port. No? A whisky then? For God's sake drink something. The men of this generation fatigue me by their incompetence. If we, or rather they, are not careful, the degrading responsibility of saddling the most conservative and best-bred nation in the world with the lemon-squash idiocies of upstart colonies and fermenting republics will rest on them. Your father drank, and his, and his, and his, and they made you. Carry on, I suggest?"

She took a box of cigars to Tony, resumed her seat and said: "Well?"

"I can't stick it, G," Tony said heavily. "Cowardly, if you like, I don't care. I am off. I telephoned to town and found Cochran at the club; he'll go with me."

"Where to?"

"Oh! Africa, India; it doesn't matter. Anywhere away."

"Best thing for you. Why not go my trip? The one I made in '96? I have the maps, details and so on."

"We might," Tony said rather vaguely.

G stirred her coffee.

"You had better, I think. So consider that settled. Now, for my instructions."

"Yes, I suppose so," Tony murmured.

G gave a little exasperated "click."

"For God's sake have one decent idea, my good man. The children, what do you want me to do with them?"

"Emilia is trustworthy, but I wish you'd see them daily, G."

"I should have done that without a suggestion from you," G said tranquilly. "Your son has certain claims on his people, I consider."

She studied Tony's expressionless face keenly.

"Come along, I will play to you probably. You will think that unfeeling, but in point of fact nothing is unfeeling which serves to distract an obsessed mind. On the contrary. I wish I had known you were coming; I would have sent for Lygon and that good-natured imbecile Letitia, whose sole sense is a card one, and we might have had a game. However, its rather late now. Do not look so bovinely distressed; I am aware grief is immortal, and sacred, and the 'thing,' but only those to whom it is quite new really believe that! When you pull down your first shot you will appreciate what I am saying.

You do not believe that either, but no matter. I will play you the 'Liebes Traum,' I think. Do have another whisky."

Tony followed her into the drawing-room; it was rather bare, beautifully lit by reflection, and contained a piano with Corot panels inset.

Two Sealyhams rose in a window seat, fell off it, and greeted Tony.

"Amor and Psyche, be quiet," G ordered, and they subsided instantly.

G took off her rings, even her wedding ring, which was so thin it was a mere thread. "Why brandish one's fate in the faces of others?" she had asked. "It merely precludes good flirtation, and makes people think you far more respectable than you would ever wish to be!" and then began to play.

She played magnificently, with power, restraint and delicacy.

Tony smoked and stared at the black oak floor which gleamed in the soft light, then at his aunt; the music had disturbed his thoughts; he began to wonder aimlessly what G had been like in her youth, which he had been told had been both triumphant and devastating. He could believe it, studying her profile, listening to the waves of sound caught up by her frail hands and flung into space; she had dominance and, with it, temperament.

Abruptly, she ceased playing, and faced him.

"Now then! I was right, hein? About the forgetting?" Her eyes laughed at him.

“And you feel it disloyal to forget, d’you not? My dear, loyalty at its best should be a spiritual and actual defence of the one we love; it should never be what most people make it, and more imagine it ought to be—a leech-like sticking to one idea, one person! Humanity has such fatiguing admiration for limitation; indeed, most of us believe that only those states of being which are static are praiseworthy! Change, flux, when you come to think of it, is nearly always resented and derided.”

She came and leant against the mantelpiece directly before Tony, one extremely slender foot poised on the low fender seat; there was no tenderness in the long look she bent on him, but there was very human interest; mentally she reviewed his future, and did it ably: he would not marry again, he would become heavier; he had one type of nature which is such a boon to Catholicism, the “accepting” type, which canonizes gratefully; Tony had already canonized Francesca.

G considered gravely the marvel of influence Francesca had exercised during her lifetime; Tony had been almost interesting then, because his nature had been drawn out by Francesca’s ceaseless affection; it seemed rather as if some natures, natures of definite “grip” and vividness, could inject themselves into other less vital ones and tone them up.

Very obviously this process had ceased; it did not endure, its effect was not lasting, and really Tony was rather boring.

"Good God!" G said to herself suddenly, "the actual hideous cruelty of one human being towards another! There is this poor devil utterly up against it, and because he is dull I wish that he would go. I wonder if many people are as hard, or would own how much of their sympathy is set to time? And, it's time Tony went, indubitably!"

He got up as she reached that thought.

"I must be off, my dear. So you'll come over and see to things and so on?"

"Yes. Good-bye, m'dear."

He came back.

"I feel I am thrusting a responsibility on you, G, but you are to be trusted."

"That's the one decent quality I do possess, and it springs from a steel-like pride! Extraordinary how many of our virtues are, as it were, caught in a vice! Good-bye again, my dear, and thank you for coming to me."

She watched him start up his car, and watched the last glint of his rear-light, like a scarlet star, wink in the darkness and disappear as the car swung into the road.

Then she lit a cigarette and walked out into the garden.

Frankly, the idea of responsibility bored her extremely; perhaps only her pride had made her accept it; she could not be "let down" in her own estimation.

She wondered idly, speculating, as she often did, how many people, if they were quite, quite honest, did things from a purely altruistic standpoint? She suspected, very few!

At any rate, at sixty her own altruism was not a sturdy growth; and instinct of *noblesse oblige* ruled her life, served her most ably for other virtues.

The people about loved her for her generosity, her friends for her wit, her relatives for her discretion.

There was about her that bright hardness which is so often the distinguishing characteristic of those favoured mortals who have never known a day's illness in their lives.

G had never missed a meet, never lost a day's yachting, and explored Africa. Stafford had died in an effort to keep up with her, her enemies said; in point of fact he had died more reasonably, and had always adored his wife. Of course he had been rather weak (a detail G had concealed from the world) and charming, exactly the man a strong woman generally marries, and then makes a success.

It had been rather impossible to make a success of Stafford because he had had no desire to do anything, so G had turned him into an explorer.

To-night, oddly enough, she thought of his death, and her own first queer feeling of relief that her freedom had been given back to her, that she no more need order her life to keep step with another

life, however desultory the march, or frequent and prolonged the halts!

They had had one son, who had died.

G let her cigarette go out; even at sixty, with forty years between that death and to-night, the wound hurt.

But it brought with it the memory of Tony's boy, of whom she was to take charge.

She decided she would go over the next morning.

After all, the responsibility, she thought as she walked to the house, had its attraction!

In her low, wide room her maid was waiting, a hard-featured but devoted woman rejoicing in the wholly inappropriate name of "Sweet." She sighed as G entered.

G walked to the big chair before the looking-glass and sat down and held out one foot; she made no comment on Sweet's obvious depression, evidenced by smothered sighs and darkest looks, as she drew off the black satin shoes with their scarlet heels and produced a pair of purple *moules*, leant back and sniffed prodigiously, an air of relentless confidence on her face.

"Very sad. I agree with you," G said briefly.

Sweet cast at her mistress that glance of resigned bitterness which springs from a sense of defraudedness, the knowledge that someone knows beforehand what we meant to tell them *en surprise* later!

She kept silence.

G felt a little wry amusement; Sweet was actually "playing up."

"Get me out of this kit quickly, and then you can leave me. I can manage," she said pleasantly.

Sweet flung an agonized glance at the raftered ceiling. Was *every* gloomiest joy thus to be snapped from her? Never!

As she began to hang up the black velvet dress she moaned clearly, turned, and ejaculated profoundly:

"Motherless—fatherless——"

"Sisterless—brotherless in this case too," G agreed. She had often felt that Bernhardt had lost a pupil in Sweet.

"Crooil—crooil hard, mam," Sweet went on in determined abandonment. "Where, I ask myself in all 'umility, are 'is lordship's father's feelings?"

"Vested in me for the time being," G said blandly.

Sweet's stricken countenance underwent a marked change; caution replaced despair; curiosity pity.

"Do I understand you to mean, mam, that, so to speak, 'is lordship's little son—and adopted child will be settlin' here?"

G very nearly exclaimed with perfect naturalness, "God forbid," but checked herself in time.

Instead, mellifluously, she told Sweet that Providence walked in varied ways. What would be, would be; and added, that all things worked together for good if a household staff were adaptable.

Sweet, gathering up a pile of ribbons and muslin, halted at the door.

"I wish you good night, mam," she said lugubriously; "if so be you can enjoy rest, the future loomin' before you."

G, drawing a novel towards her, was not certain she had won the day; the future certainly "loomed."

In spirit she raised her hat to Sweet.

CHAPTER VI

*"Happy hearts and happy faces,
Happy play in grassy places—
That was how, in ancient ages,
Children grew to kings and sages.*

*"But the unkind and the unruly,
And the sort who eat unduly,
They must never hope for glory;
Theirs is quite a different story!"*

R. L. S.

WHEN G discovered, some months after his father's departure, that Rex was very slightly crippled, she cabled to Tony for his instructions; when none came she began to pilgrimage to famous surgeons.

In her code it was a thing unforgivable, it should have been impossible, for one of the family to be maimed, for the stock to have a blemish. The idea was repugnant and humiliating, and paradoxically it awoke in her the strongest emotion she had ever known; there sprang up for Rex a love which had never bloomed for any other living being, even her own son.

Patiently, tirelessly, she journeyed with Rex and Emilia and Doro to Paris, New York, Geneva, Berlin, Copenhagen, in search of some man who

could make a tiny crooked limb straight, and she would have travelled to Thibet had she received assurance that the miracle could be performed there.

Of Tony she had no news; occasionally a message came from him containing no information, save a rough indication of his whereabouts probably two months earlier. G bothered not at all about him; he would return; the "code" allowed the men of the family to roam; they invariably came back to Hurstpoint; the code decreed that they should.

When Rex was eight and had been seen by, and made firm friends with, about a dozen most eminent surgeons of the day, they returned *en famille* to settle down at home.

"An' a good thing too," Doro said. "I can ride now, can't I, G?"

"Naturally," G agreed.

But she had not bargained for a vision of her adopted relative seated on a pony which bucked the very first morning of their arrival, stable-boys and grooms in hot pursuit, and Doro's head upflung, her face extremely white, her green eyes blazing with terrified yet glorious excitement.

G and Rex watched her; G secretly trembling a little, Emilia openly wailing.

The pony bucked down the avenue; a groom approached him, and he went off at a gallop.

Doro sat well back, her small hands gripping the

rough mane, her own curls blown back like a dark flame.

"Gad!" G told herself, "if I didn't know the child had no breeding, I should swear she had!"

Doro landed almost at her feet, and faced her instantly.

"You said 'naturally' when I asked," she stated. She was visibly trembling, but she stood her ground.

Emilia caught her up in her arms, and began to kiss her wildly.

"Put Miss Doro down," G commanded instantly. She held out her veined, slender hand to Doro.

"From to-day you will ride with a groom and leading rein, my dear."

"I adore you," Doro replied intensely. She had heard Pasquale Greville say that to G, and had seen her smile; besides, she was grateful and wanted to say so, and particularly, say it rightly.

"Thank you," G responded as gravely. "You had better let Emilia undress and bathe you now. When you are ready let her bring you to Rex and me on the terrace."

Greville, home on a brief leave, and amused by G, was staying at the house; he strolled on to the terrace now, his head gleaming in the sunshine, a cigarette between his lips.

"Where have you been?" G asked him.

"In the library."

"You missed a rather enjoyable and quite nerve-devastating sight. Doro managed to mount one of

the ponies and rode it down the avenue—the beast bucked badly; she did not fall.”

“I wish I had seen that,” Greville agreed, “a thoroughly good sight. One imagines, G, that child will be a personality some day. No nerves, superb health, green eyes, and made rather like a mythical being, so straightly and fairly. What will you bet, my dear, that she won’t fashion life?”

“It is a pity she is not of our blood,” G returned rather absently.

Doro appeared, walking towards them; she had on a little holland frock and white socks with black strap shoes; she looked innocuous, extremely pretty and marvellously clean, the typical good child of the fairy tale.

“Hullo, Alice,” Greville called, “come here!”

She went obediently and, leaning against him, bent to smell the tiny gloire de Dijon in his button-hole. “I hear you have been very enterprising.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh, courageous and adventurous, daring, in your understanding.”

“That’s a good deal to make one word mean,” Doro said. “Do you pay it extra?”

Greville was delighted with her quickness; he had called her “Alice,” but he had not expected her to know her “Looking Glass” so well, even had she caught the allusion.

“I think I should win my bet?” he remarked to G over Doro’s head.

“A good memory proves very little,” G said, rather tartly. “The dullest people often have one, and take it to themselves to glory, and even seem to consider it an achievement. Why! Heaven knows! Since it is mostly a matter of chance, like having a squint or the wrong sort of speaking voice; you either have it or you haven’t, despite all this craze for mental exercises to strengthen the memory, which of course only benefit people who have one already, and for them to pay a fee for such a purpose is on a par—to my way of thinking—with thanking your feet for walking! However, evolution, I suppose, and it helps the mania for self-analysis—a most dangerous interest, I consider; as if everyone of us, if we ever do confess honestly, did not spend all our spare time concentrating on ourselves! And now to invent excuses to enable one to do it more intensively! Psycho-analysis will be the ruin of quick living (the only way *to* live) and nice slow thinking that never hampered your action at all! And those things have kept the world a pretty decent place up to now, take it all in all! Meddling with instincts, focusing any interest on ’em is a mistake, believe me. Dissection only serves one purpose, the growth of practical knowledge, and one’s instincts, like the origin of fire, will for ever remain an eternal mystery. And should do. ’Pon my soul, it’s a relief to me to think there is something that can’t be explained by science—or muddled up by it.”

Her eyes rested almost tragically on Rex as he ran across to Doro.

“One is expected to grant science supernatural power, and it has not yet discovered how to straighten a crooked limb!”

Greville stirred; like all men of his type, any emotion of a distressing nature vaguely annoyed him.

“Rex’s limb will not handicap him,” he said indifferently. “He is quite a decent height for his age—he will probably grow tall, like all of us—and he is a good-looking little beggar.”

Rex turned towards them as he spoke; he was standing on the terrace steps and his deformity was concealed; the sun poured over him, making his fair hair a cap of gleaming gold, throwing into his dark eyes little golden dancing reflections.

G’s mouth softened as she looked at him, quivered a very little; and she said with determination: “Special stirrups of course, and so on. One can arrange everything.”

“Is he at all nervous?” Greville asked perfunctorily. There was in his voice none of the amused pleasure it had held whilst he had spoken of Doro; intuitively he resented Rex’s shortened limb; such a thing offended his sense of the beautiful which he had cultivated until it had become of a diseased fastidiousness.

He had that vague contempt for Rex some people

always feel with regard to any oddity in life or humanity.

G laughed lightly—derisively.

“My dear Pan!”

The tone, the laugh, stirred Greville’s vanity, never a heavy sleeper; he was used to quiescence from women, young or old.

He said now, his beautiful eyes half closed, a faint smile on his lips:

“Doro’s stunt would have been rather beyond him, alas!”

“Doro is nearly three years older than Rex,” G said in the sharp voice of hurt age. She rose and went to Rex and took his hand and walked away with him, keeping him on the side of her farthest from Greville’s vision.

Rex went with her gaily; he adored her, had no fear of her whatever; there was between them the strangest, strongest companionship and genuine love.

Perhaps because of his poor foot, perhaps merely owing to the very forceful impression of herself, her views, G left on people, Rex was, without being precocious, or even advanced, extremely understanding.

He was still a very little boy, but he had a natural sweetness, a rather penetrating sweetness somehow, and all the reckless delightfulness of childhood, allied to a mentality intensely stimulated by G, and

one which had received a good deal of assistance towards development from his wandering life.

G had taught him to read very early, and, at the age of eight and a half he read as he chose and his choice was decidedly interesting; he adored horses and had a great love of boxing, and had read nearly every old book in the big library on both subjects. And he adored fairy stories too and funny long tales out of the old "Household Words," which filled one shelf.

His speech was polyglot, and the more attractive because it was so; Emilia talked to him in Spanish, G often spoke French; Rex used bits of either language. He had a certain very charming clearness of enunciation and deliberation in his speech which gave an odd, rather dear little effect of dignity.

Perhaps this had been fostered by G's insistence that he should, directly he was old enough, take his own position in the house; she had explained to him that he represented his father and that to do so was a distinction. Rex, like every child, loved playing a part, and secretly enjoyed his rôle enormously. Entirely normal, despite his collection of attributes, he had days of devilishness like every other small boy, and very usual needs and "wants."

To-day Doro's spirited performance had naturally made him long to go and do likewise.

He said so.

"G?"

"Yes, darling."

"I too should like to ride, I think, hein?"

G's hold on his hand tightened for a moment.

"You are not quite big enough."

"I could have a very little pony, my darling, the littlest ever."

He had a store of what he called "dear words" which he used solely for G, and for which loyalty, in her heart, she worshipped him.

She looked down and met his eyes, determined, very clear and hopeful.

"You do not think you would be frightened, Rex?"

"Doro wasn't."

"Doro is older."

"Do you think that matters, my love? If I would be frightened, I 'spect I'll be it later on just as easily as now."

He stopped and stood before her, and said with eager earnestness:

"Let's just—just take a very little look at the stables, shall we?"

It was noon, the stable-yard was hot and empty, the pleasant sound of water rushing somewhere above broke the silence.

"This is where Rufus lives," Rex announced. "He is no end of a devil, Sam says."

G laughed. She opened Rufus's door and went in to him; back went his sleek little ears, he shivered,

the whites of his wicked beautiful eyes showed for a second.

"Put me up, put me up, G," Rex begged, shivering, too, with excitement, his eyes blazing, his yellow hair ruffled by an impatient hand.

G lifted him easily, but she was short, and Rex was not very big; he caught at Rufus's mane and tugged himself on to his back. Rufus lashed out with temper, but G, to whom fear was a thing unknown, never moved, though about her there seemed a welter of little, vicious gleaming hoofs and white-rimmed, angry eyes.

But Rex screamed once, and as if it had been a command, Rufus stopped kicking and was still.

G lifted Rex down; neither spoke; in the stable-yard Greville was standing; he had been watching with Doro. G's face coloured very slowly, very faintly; she met Greville's smile.

"Ah! you here? Hot, isn't it? And surely it must be nearly lunch-time?"

Rex's hand was quivering, and unclasping within hers. Greville looked at his wrist-watch; then his amused glance rested on his small nephew.

"Still frightened?" he asked.

"No," Rex said. His voice shook a very little.

Greville laughed.

"Doro will have to teach you," he said teasingly; "she is brave, anyway!"

Rex went on looking quite directly at him, but his face flushed vividly.

He loosed G's hand as Greville finished speaking, and sprang awkwardly straight at him.

"You—you beast," he said chokingly.

There was a second's utter silence; G's voice cut into it imperiously:

"Rex, apologize to your uncle at once."

Rex turned to her, his lips opened, shut again. G's eyes, dominant to all the rest of the world, appealed to him; the colour drained slowly from his face.

He said in his quietest voice:

"I 'pologize, Uncle Pan."

He waited a second, then alone, walked across the big yard through the high gates and on towards the house.

G, after a moment, followed him slowly.

Doro looked at Greville, considering him gravely.

"You were a beast, you know," she said tranquilly. "Boys hate to be laughed at before girls. So do men."

"Do they indeed! Why, I wonder?"

"'Cos they are so vain," Doro said indifferently.

"And how do you know that, Mademoiselle Sagesse?"

"G said so; I heard her tell Lord Doney more in Paris, that old thin, little man with the moustaches like tiny white swords, who laughed in a wheeze. An' he said being vain made you—it's a long word, but G said it means get-at-able, and if men weren't so vain, women would have a slow time. Why?"

Greville, since his stay at Hurstpoint, had begun to cultivate towards the word "why" that feeling of helplessly enraged irritation occasioned in the soul by the presence of an active mosquito when you long to sleep, and cannot catch the insect, and are powerless to resist it.

"Why?" Doro asked again.

Greville appealed for heavenly assistance in two words.

"God knows," he said.

"Yes, He knows everything," Doro returned sapiently. "Mustn't it be queer *never* to have to wonder, and course He can't if He always knows. Should you like being like that, Pan?"

She had called him Pan from the very first.

The luncheon gong boomed deeply from the house.

Doro danced up and down.

"T.G.—food! Race you to the terrace, Pan darlin'?"

"Oh, I've a bone in my leg," Greville protested basely.

"So have I, so's everyone, lots."

She let clear, kindly contempt rest on him for that old prevarication.

"Don't be a fool, come on!"

Laughing, he raced, and asked Doro as they reached the house who allowed her to say fool?

"Everyone says it," Doro returned blithely.

“Emilia and G, and Rex and me, you—often, I’ve heard you.”

She danced into the hall where lunch was laid on a round table in one of the big window embrasures, and gave a shriek of joy.

“Duck—oh, duck—how heavenly! Lots of stuffin’, please, Wyckham,” she commanded the butler, “and get a move on, too, please.”

G corrected her, laughed, damned the apple sauce.

The children at their lunch drank sherry in special little glasses; G had drunk sherry in her childhood, and had still, as she phrased it, the palate of a gourmande and the digestion of an ostrich! Two facts which proved to her conclusive satisfaction that her upbringing was worthy of imitation.

Rex, at the head of the table, looked pale but composed; he was deadly polite to Greville.

He was just a little boy in a thousand ways, but in one or two others he was extraordinarily advanced, and he had been encouraged to exercise his intuition. Now, sitting at the head of his table, G facing him at the other end, he watched his guest with steady, dark eyes, and hated him. From that day he resented Greville in his life and despised him.

For his vanity had not been hurt, but his trust in the decency of those grown-ups who belonged to him, and should therefore have been generous, had been destroyed in the case of Greville for ever by his taunt.

"I was afraid, but I did stick on," Rex told himself.

From that day he never willingly stayed with Greville, or talked closely with him.

To-day his funny little dignity, which can make a child so unapproachable, visibly surrounded him.

He had the quaintest, yet quite natural, old-fashioned manners, severe and stately, inculcated by G, and now he sat at lunch with his kinsman when G and Doro had left, waiting with patient courtesies until Greville should have drunk his cognac and coffee, when he would be free to go.

"What are you doing this afternoon?" Greville asked him idly.

"I don't know," Rex answered; like all children he detested questions.

"Going to read—drive——?"

"I don't think so."

"Doesn't anyone plan your time for you?"

"No."

Rex's composure, which Greville chose to consider merely conceit, a result of having been badly spoilt, irritated him obscurely; he knew, with the quick intuition of vanity, he had lost ground with Rex, and he felt resentment against Rex for having put him in a position to do so.

Behind, on the terrace, invisible to Rex, a figure halted—a man's; he walked towards the window. Greville's eyes expressed a second's intense surprise; then he said, very languidly:

"Ah, Tony!" and to Rex, "Your father."

Rex wheeled on the instant, his small face, dead white with excitement, gazed into the dark one of the man before him.

He was a highly-strung boy; he hesitated, then flushed scarlet, then advanced.

"I—I am Rex, your son," he said.

Tony bent down and picked him up; then oddly, awkwardly, set him on his feet again very quickly.

"Tell the people I am back, will you, Pasquale?" he said in a curiously slow voice.

Greville left the room; Tony and Rex were alone together.

Tony sat down suddenly.

"Come here," he said to Rex.

Rex went unhesitatingly and stood between his knees, a small hand on each; the two looked long at one another.

"You didn't—didn't write much," Rex said.

"No, I suppose not."

Rex struggled to make conversation.

"Am I like the son you—you thought I would be?"

"You're damn like *her*," Tony said heavily.

His utterance was almost uncouth; he had lived alone so long that speech had become a rare thing with him. All the years he had spoken but when he had been forced to do so; for the last four years he had been the only white man within a radius of a hundred miles.

He had come home because an epidemic had broken out in his district; he had given his house as a hospital, and watched men die by the score.

He had not intended to return even when he had left Saiwunga; but he had trekked to a port, and a boat had been leaving, and he had found several letters of G's, and he had thought he might as well go back for a little.

London had terrified him, he had become blunted; but fear had pierced his heavy armour of insensibility, and he had fled, as one possessed, haunted, to Hurstpoint.

He felt nothing now save a dull perplexity. G came in, a bright spot of colour on either thin cheek, and after one swift glance at him, greeted him quite casually.

“ You haven't lunched? ”

“ No.”

“ Ah! I'll have some sent in at once.”

Wyckham came in with the tray, and nearly wept with joy to see his master, but Rexford merely nodded, muttered the man's name; the welcome petered out, because a little ridiculous.

Rexford ate and drank largely; the household tip-toed to the door, eager, glad; he nodded to them, too, inarticulately.

“ What a Shavian rendering of the wanderer's return! ” Greville murmured with malicious amusement.

He was genuinely amused, but G was not; the code demanded no hysterical ebullition, naturally, when a member of the clan came home, but such a return . . . !

She faced Tony across his own table, a cigarette in her hand, her dark eyes glowing.

"Antony, please listen."

"I am," he said, in the same stocky, almost stupid way.

"Then take heed! Your position demands certain things; one is consideration to those you employ. I beg you to show it. You had better make a little speech of thanks for their welcome."

"Why?"

G brought a clenched hand down on the dark wood table.

"Decency of feeling; your sense of responsibility."

"Rot!" Tony said lethargically.

She looked closely at him; this man was the real man, she sensed that in the instant; appeal would be useless.

She rose and went to the window, tears of grief and a sharp humiliation in her eyes; she could not have described her feelings, but she knew they were poignant and pathetic.

She turned to look again at Tony; all his fine air of athleticism had gone; he, like his mind, had thickened; it was almost as if some invisible coat-had been welded over him, not quite effacing,

but dimming all the old features of his personality; he was not obese, but he looked dully solid, and his face was burnt, and the whites of his eyes permanently bloodshot by the sun, his thick hair looked lifeless, his fingers broad-tipped and uncared for.

Of course, his clothes were grotesque, but that could be remedied.

"And the rest?" G asked herself wretchedly. "For now I shall not be expected to stay, and the children—Rex—and his father—"

She clasped her hands in sudden impotence; her age seemed to crowd upon her in that moment; she felt the weight of the years for the first time.

She wheeled suddenly.

"Antony," she said almost desperately.

He rose and crossed to her.

"What's up, G, my dear?"

"Antony, what do you mean to do?"

"To do?"

"Now you are home; now that you will have the children to educate?"

"They'll be all right, won't they? I noticed the boy's right foot. Odd. A pity."

G laughed that she might not cry.

"Oh, yes," she said, controlling her voice with difficulty, a vision of those wearying pilgrimages to one surgeon after another trailing through her tired mind, "oh, yes, but Doro is all right!"

"Good. I'd better see her, hadn't I?"

"I'll ring for her to come down."

They waited in silence for Doro's appearance.

She came in quickly, her eyes saw Rexford instantly; she stood for a second poised on her narrow feet, her eyes wide, brilliant, her lips parted a little.

Then, with a swallow's dart, she had reached him, was clinging to him, calling his name: "Tony, Tony," rapturously.

She drew herself upright by clutching at his coat and looked into his face.

"You've come back! Oh, *heavenly!* G, isn't it booful lovely; oh! Tony, aren't you glad to see me? Yes, yes, you must be; oh, Tony, I love you."

Tony's stolid face broke a little, he smiled.

"Kiss me quick—fast," Doro commanded; she rubbed her cheek to his. "Goodness—you are all prickly! Is that bein' abroad? Do you grow like that? Tony, I can ride; I did, didn't I, G? And, Tony, I can speak in French and sing it. Oh, I love you—darlin', dear."

G left them together, her heart, jealous for Rex, contracting with bitterness. As she went she heard Tony laugh, a sort of dull roar . . . but no one else had won a smile from him. . . .

And soon they were walking, Doro and he, together in the park.

Rex came up to G.

"Fathers are strange people," he said, ruminatively. "Of course, I do not remember mine, G, but he seems very, very unfatherlike, don't you think?"

'Course Doro knew him before, that makes a difference."

He stood watching the big figure and the little white-clad one casting shadows on the brilliant grass.

"It'll be odd to have one always about the place," he remarked at length, speaking of a father much as one would of a wheel-chair, or any other mechanical device, and suddenly his arms went round G's neck; he clung to her with the passionate abandonment a child can feel when it is unhappy.

"We never liked s'prises, did we?" he whispered; "you always said, darlin', they were a mistake."

* * * * *

CHAPTER VII

*"Oh, grown-ups cannot understand,
And grown-ups never will,
How short's the way to fairyland
Across the purple hill. . . .
. . . And yet—at just a child's command—
The world's an Eden still!"*

ALFRED NOYES.

IN his own rooms memory assailed Tony. The insidious spell of the house which had roofed his ancestors, which had come down to him as a heritage, began to make itself evident; he had again that old satisfying feeling of "belonging" somewhere, the feeling which will call a man from happiness, riches, the farthest place on earth. Tony had never known he had missed his house, but he knew it now.

He leant far out of the window in his bedroom, and the scent of the earth came to him and made him draw his breath sharply; the ivy rustled in the night wind; that disembodied feeling which it is possible to experience after a fresh shock, complete change from one place to another, possessed him; he was able to contrast, as if he passed from one land to the other, the clearing he had called home in Saiwunga, and this real home. He could still see the grass growing like spears, glittering in the blazing

moonlight; still hear the jungle cries, faint, mysteriously eerie; here, the roses blew in the starshine, and the bells chimed over the fields.

But even in this tranquillity he did not find complete satisfaction; he had been robbed of the nearness of immediate association, and as one can feel an illogical regret upon saying good-bye, when in reality one is aware one will experience a genuine relief directly the actual separation has taken place, so now Tony felt almost an aggrieved sense of forlornness. He walked about the room; there was a picture of Francesca on the walls, and below it a portrait of Rex.

He stared into Francesca's face.

He had not forgotten, but he had not, during the last year, remembered very much.

He was seven years older; he found himself thinking how pretty she had been—"pretty as paint."
. . . His mind stirred unhappily.

What was the good of remembering?

Besides, he had cultivated a knack of slamming down a little door in his mind on all thoughts that bothered. He slammed it now.

If one did not, memories of loneliness assailed one, and they were hideous.

Even with the door slammed ghosts crept sometimes.

He stared out at the softly shadowed park, above which the star-jewelled sky hung like a benison.

He would take on the farms, run the place, live for it.

During the voyage home he had planned the future that way; it was a relief to find he could pursue his purpose.

A thought of Pasquale drifted across his mind: odd that he still felt as he did towards him.

Pan did not fit, that was it; it would be decent to see old Charles again sometimes. His life abroad seemed to have loosed him from all sense of responsibility.

Greville said of him to G, maliciously smiling:

"As an example of a broken heart, Tony is rather disillusioning, what?"

"He is atrophied," G returned quickly. "It is a tragedy, Pan, but I fail to find it an amusing one."

Her whole mind was absorbed by the thought of the future, Rex's first, then Doro's, for she had a genuine regard for her; she would naturally suggest her own departure at an early date, and the idea of Rex, dependent on Tony for every interest, was poignantly distressing.

All through the summer night she lay awake and worried. With the morning sleep came, and hardly had it come, it seemed to poor G, than Rex arrived also.

Regularly, each morning, he accompanied her cup of tea.

To-day, he sat with bare feet, clad in his pyjamas, and "poured out."

"I love the 'scentiness' of your room, darling," he said conversationally; "it smells like you do, sandal-woody and bunches of flowers."

He climbed down and limped to G's dressing-table and gravely sprayed himself from an atomizer containing jasmine perfume.

"I like you looking the same in bed as up, too," he remarked. "Emilia's an awful hidjus-uggy in bed."

"Hidjus-uggy" was a word the children had made. It belonged to the "Nick" language and was entirely understood.

"Really," G said absently.

"Yes, really; she has paper hair things, but you look darlin'."

"You flatter me!"

"Well, you like it, my love, don't you?" Rex inquired carelessly, taking a spoon carefully round the jam-dish.

G laughed with pleasure in him; he was so sweet, and queer, and natural.

He looked up, licking the spoon enjoyably.

"That's better," he said a little inarticulately. "I love you laughin', your eyes go like black stars."

"Ever seen a black star?" G asked, pretending to study a letter.

"No, but I can *think* them."

"D'you think many things like black stars?"

"'Bout Doro and you I do. Doro's darlin' to look at, too."

"My friend, you begin early!"

"Early what? Can I have that bit of toast?"

"Yes; but you will spoil your own breakfast."

"Yes; but it isn't toast and this sort of jam, so it doesn't matter."

He slid forward a little when he had finished the toast, and leant his head back on G's shoulder; the adorable littleness and trust of him swept over her in a wave of tenderness.

"What made you choose this cherry-pie coloured silky thing?" he asked, pulling the fringe of G's dressing-jacket. "An' have a bow that colour in your hair, all done up?"

G laughed again.

"Darling, I am old, as old as old, but just the same I want to seem as nice as I did when I was very young. In fact, I wish more earnest than I did then, to seem nice! One ought to . . . we all ought. Y'know, Rex, one's body is a temple in a way, and we are expected to keep it fair. My way of keeping mine so is to have the scents you love, and cherry-pie coloured ribbons and so on—as a decoration, d'you see?"

Rex stretched luxuriously.

"A temple," he echoed meditatively, wriggling his toes, and studying them. "G, what are my decorations?"

G considered him: stumped again by the devilish ingenuity of childhood to bowl "googlies" in the question line!

"Well, you rather liked your overcoat," she hazarded, "and that tie we bought in Paris—the deep blue silk one."

A bell rang.

Rex sat up and slid an arm about G's neck.

"I must be goin', my love," his face very close to hers; they kissed, and he leant a cheek on her silver hair close to the lilac bow.

"I do love you, G."

"And I you."

He released her and scrambled free.

"That's all right then. I guess my little temple's going to be scrubbed now."

G laughed at him with tears in her eyes.

"I guess it is. Afterwards, decorate it for my sake, with the white flannel suit and Paris tie."

"All right, darlin'." He went off at a limping run, shouting for Emilia.

Sweet came in to dress G, her lugubrious face gloomier than ever.

"There'll be sad changes now, mam," she remarked with relish.

In her heart she was intensely sorry for her mistress, but Sweet's nature was so constituted that any sorrow was its greatest pleasure; just as certain people really only enjoy singing burial hymns and would rather attend a funeral than a matinée.

To-day she thought G looked her age, and it was not often she did that. She handed a lip-stick to her mistress (G's sole "aid," with the exception of

the bistre shadows), and watched with sympathy for once whilst it was applied. Its use was generally reserved for evenings, so Sweet recognized the portent.

"Well may we ask ourselves, mam, what the future holds now?" she suggested.

"Why?" G snapped.

"'Is lordship back, so different, so strangely h'altered."

"His lordship had a terrible blow in her ladyship's death."

"There's few 'as memories so faithful, mam. It should be a comfort to us to find it."

She began to brush G's thick, silver hair, punctuating the even strokes of the brush with comments on life at Hurstpoint and in general.

"Plans will be changed—life do seem strange—a'most like a sleeper wakened—seven years gone. 'Is lordship's fleshier, mam—what, I ask meself, 'appens now?—Wanderers again—"

"Sweet, be quick," G ordered with asperity. Precisely the same question Sweet had asked had been tormenting her.

What *was* to happen now?

Would Tony ask her to remain as *châtelaine* of his house? Once she could have counted on his consideration; now he seemed to have forgotten the meaning of the word.

She must broach the subject that morning; if the worst came to the worst Pointers was not very far;

Rex could come over and see her often. But she would miss him in the morning, and at evening time—and all time, she confessed wretchedly to herself.

She walked into the dining-room to find Tony seated there with Doro: Greville breakfasted in his own room.

“Tony says I can ride to-day,” Doro burst out, “and he’ll teach me to drive and hunt. T.G., you’ve come home, Tony darling!”

After breakfast, when Rex’s tutor, the vicar’s boy, down for long vacation, had taken him off with Doro, G approached Tony definitely.

“It will be wiser to have an understanding,” she said.

Pan had already “given notice”; he was leaving for town that day *en route* for “Heaven knows where—or perhaps not Heaven!”

“Very probably not,” G had agreed drily.

Tony offered no comment, made no suggestion; at last, dignified in her driven forlornness, G spoke of returning to Pointers.

“I’ll take you over,” Tony said.

She looked at him in dumb amazement; for seven years—more than seven years actually—she had sacrificed her entire life to Tony’s interests, Tony’s children; it is true that his agent and bailiffs had managed the estate, but she had had to superintend their activities.

And of course with regard to Doro and Rex. . . . She remembered that evening years before, when

Tony had come to Pointers to ask her help, and she had found him so boring in his dull absorption of grief; odd that then she had not realized it to be merely the small exercise of a small mind.

For it had been that: Tony's whole life had proved it; he had not suffered, by reason of a searching vision which had been his; he had suffered without one, and thus narrowed down his feelings to numbness—not that tragic numbness which is the result of an anti-climax of anguish, but that complacent numbness which has no recollection, no direct spring of existence.

She met Tony's bovine look with a quick, "Thanks. I'll tell Sweet to pack. I can leave in time for tea, I think."

She went in search of Rex later, and they walked to the old rose garden, and G sat on the circular stone seat, warmed through and through by the sunshine, whilst Rex settled on the grass.

"I go back to Pointers to-day," she said to him.

"Why?" he demanded instantly.

"Your father will look after you. He is home, you see, and that arrangement is a right one."

"I hate it," Rex said, kneeling up. "G, don't you hear, I hate it."

"And I, too," she longed to cry to him; instead she said, as levelly as she could:

"Pointers is quite near."

"Pointers isn't breakfast in bed and good-night kissing, and all the while. It's all the while that

matters so. G, oh darling, I hate it so, I hate it so."

"Darling, don't," G begged. The idea of severance from this rare, yet never very distant, lovely intimacy, which can exist when a child loves and has a tenderness no other love or companionship can possess, made her feel unutterably tired and old.

She consoled Rex with a description of future meetings.

"Father is not what I'd choose to be left with," Rex said candidly.

"You do not know him yet."

"No; but I think about him, and that's what I do think."

Doro and he argued together in their sitting-room about G's departure.

"But if G's going, Tony's come. and it balances things, don't you see?"

Rex faced her with passionate conviction.

"Nothing balances for losing someone you love tight."

"But don't you love Tony?"

"No."

"But he's your father."

"I know, but it doesn't matter."

Doro drew her straight, fine eyebrows together:

"But, Rex, it *ought* to."

She studied Rex's close-shut mouth.

"I love him like anything," she volunteered.

"You had room to, you see," Rex said surprisingly, and after that would discuss the point no more.

They all drove in with G to Pointers. Rex stayed behind the last to kiss her good-bye, then he ran back, as quickly as he could, to the car.

G found on her pillow a bunch of roses, rather short as to stem, but wrapped in a piece of paper on which was written, "With lodes of love from your adoring Rex."

CHAPTER VIII

"Il arrive souvent que des choses se présentent plus achevées à notre esprit qu'il ne les pourroit faire avec beaucoup d'art."—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

BY the time Doro was seventeen Rexford had transformed Hurstpoint into a place where you slept and ate when you were neither hunting, shooting, fishing, nor pursuing any other seasonable sport. He had been helped towards this achievement by an old friend, a widower who (a second resemblance also) lived for himself and sport. Foster Pembroke contributed one outside asset: he talked well and he had read widely. Both Doro and Rex liked him and listened to him; he taught them how to read intelligently, and guided their choice in books, and if his tastes were somewhat catholic and contained works scarcely suitable to his admirer's outlook or age, neither they nor he recognized the fact, nor were they likely to do so in a house where men ruled and the only feminine influence was that of a kinswoman whose own outlook was that of a more naturally robust generation than her own.

Doro and Rex were educated in jerks: when a tutor was available, when Rex was fit enough, when

Doro could spare time from hunting or racing, or shooting.

One accomplishment alone was hers, and G had insisted on its cultivation, and had herself arranged for a master to come from London once a week: Doro could sing. She had a voice which promised glorious things and a curiously eclectic taste in music.

For Tony she would sing any song, and he would sit over his port, his red face intent, encouraging her hoarsely, whilst Foster Pembroke criticized her rendering.

Rex and G received the benefit of her own taste—Spanish songs, songs by Grieg, Lassen, Chaminade; it was before the days of Ravel, Wolff, Duparc.

Cavini, who made the fatiguing journey to Hurst-point weekly, enthused wildly to G.

“It is a Heaven-sent voice—it is all there, you understand. There will be no trouble. Dio! what a loss to Opera! What a crime, a sin, to make no use of such a voice!”

G did not argue the point. Of course her niece, even if she was so only by adoption, could not sing publicly: it was one of those quite Bohemian ideas which were amusing, but so lacking in discernment.

Rex said to Doro:

“Would you like to sing in Opera?”

Doro, cursing over the fit of a new habit, answered absently:

"Rather fun, don't you think? *Carmen*, for instance, or *Mignon*. Drat this tailor—the man's a fool."

"Tut, tut!" said Rex.

He had not the splendid time which Doro adored and lived for; he was often "not very fit" or had a breakdown; he loathed being ill, and was intractable and moody until he felt fit again.

His father, appearing occasionally, would boom at him: "Easy does it, eh? But you mustn't give in too quickly. Got to keep goin' as much as you can."

Rex would reply: "Yes, sir," wearily; he realized his father's deficiency of mental vision and felt no resentment for his criticism, no special sentiment towards him at all; they agreed because they never disagreed; Tony was seldom available for any friendly overtures had Rex wished to make one; he was generally attended by Pembroke and one or two other ardent sportsmen; he drowsed through the days at home when he had to be there, drinking heavily, and talking, if he talked at all, with Doro.

He was proud of her and fond of her; he gave her everything she wanted, and only asked that she should share his love of sport; at seventeen she knew less of life than many girls of thirteen, more about horses and dogs than a man of thirty, and was a slender, beautiful, straight thing, all long lines, reminiscent rather of a racer, as clean-limbed and perfect in poise. She rode superbly, shot like

a man, swore like one, and could jump like a boy. If she had cut her hair she might have passed for a boy, with her slightly tanned long hands and length of slenderness.

Rex topped her by a couple of inches, but his limp was still evident.

He was too thin, but he had breadth of shoulder, and his fair hair and dark eyes, eyebrows, and lashes, gave him an air of distinction; he looked different from the average boy, and was immensely particular, without being affected, about his clothes, a tendency ardently fostered by G, who, if Tony spoilt Doro, evened the scale by spoiling Rex.

She was nearly eighty, but was still a dominant character. Rex adored her; they had no secrets from one another, and G talked with him quite frankly; neither felt that the difference of years counted; their minds met in happiness, and G's gift of love to Rex gave a colour and worth to his life it would never, otherwise, have owned.

Her outlook was that of her day, the day when men had balked at subtlety, divided women into definite classes, considered honour a natural attribute and not a distinction, cultivated the narrowest views and largest morals, and had been keen, quite simple, enjoyable, and sentimental.

Rex, by intuition and choice, insomuch as he could make choice at his age, was a modern of the moderns; but G's outlook had a fascination for him, and G's manners were a joy to him.

He had distinct views on responsibility and the dignity of life, despite his youth. He argued with Doro often, who had no views, or rather views so scattered that to attempt to catch one and discuss it was rather like pursuing flying leaves with an egg-spoon. She was a Socialist one day, a rabid Conservative the next, both together later, and so on and so forth.

"It's because I'm *not*, I suppose," she said firmly to Rex, "and you *are*! You see, I haven't any obligations—social ones, I mean; a tent doesn't confer them, whereas a turreted house and a house in St. James's—oh, là là!"

Her origin had a great charm for both Rex and herself.

"We'll go to Spain one day," she said. "Tony shall take us."

"That will, indeed, be romantic," Rex said dryly.

"He *is*, he can be; deep down he's different to anything you think of him," Doro protested. "I know—I feel it. It's because I love him and you don't."

"Perhaps it's because you can endow people you are fond of with all the qualities you admire," Rex suggested in an elderly way.

"Well, if I do it makes things easier!" Doro laughed. "But"—she grew serious—"I am right about Tony."

Rex heeded very little either way; he was indulging in a discussion with Doro from his bed,

whither a bad toss out hunting had driven him. He had sprained himself and was bored and out of temper with his world.

Doro had come in to have tea with him, and was standing beside the window; outside a dull November day was drawing to a dismal close; the gorgeous fire leaping up the open chimney made the weather seem even gloomier.

"Ordered crumpets?" Rex asked, raising a ruffled head from his pillow.

"Yes. Feelin' better, old boy?"

"No, rotten."

"Damn bad luck! That wall had absolutely no take-off. Like a light?"

"Not just yet."

"Head bad?"

"A bit."

Doro crossed the room and sat down on the bed and laid cool, slim fingers on Rex's forehead.

"Oh, that's jolly," he said with a little sigh. "What topping scent you've got on—what is it?"

"G gave it to me. She says every woman ought to appreciate perfume, and use it with perception."

"I appreciate your perception this afternoon, anyway," Rex murmured. "You're like jasmine flowers at night, Doro."

"I wish I said those sort of things—thought them," Doro exclaimed. "You have beautiful words, Rex, y'know. I suppose it's readin' so much, partly."

"For God's sake don't drop your 'g's,'" Rex said impatiently. "It's awful—I hate it—cropping words like a puppy's tail! It's cruel to them!"

Doro laughed, her fingers slid into his thick, yellow hair.

"But don't, I do hate it!" Rex protested. "I hate beautiful things to do unbeautiful ones!"

"D'you think I'm really beautiful?"

"Yes. So do you."

"Sometimes I get worried," Doro said. "It's my type—other girls are different. Daphne Carew—that gold and white effect of hers—that's lovely, if you like."

"Yes, and ordinary, my dear kid; it's the unordinary that has the pull! And you—oh! I dunno, it's your eyes being so green. . . . Awf'ly few people ever have really green eyes, you know. You read of 'em and hear of 'em, but you scarcely ever meet 'em. I was talking with G about it, and she agreed. And yours are green as——" he sought for a simile; "they are like the sea on a very still, hot day. You must have noticed it sometimes? In Cornwall, I remember thinking of your eyes when I was standing on a cliff and looking down, and one long drift was clearest, sheerest green, with the sun pouring through it. That's your eyes in some lights, and in others they're like jasmine and jasmine leaves, very dark green with little reflections like stars in them: jasmine petals in their leaves. I ought to have been a poet. I may be yet."

They laughed together.

"D'you want to write; would you like to?" Doro asked.

"No, not really. Really, I want to do all the things you do, but I knock up so quickly, damn it."

"Oh, I don't know," Doro said consolingly, "anyone would be laid up after a toss like the one you took yesterday. And no one can help runnin' into bad luck sometimes!"

Rex looked at her, they both laughed.

"Don't you see chopping off your 'g's' is so ugly?" he expostulated; "all abbreviations are. You take a perfectly good name or word that's never done you any harm and, like the White Queen, you say: 'Off with their heads!' (only it's tails this time!). I like Dolores heaps better than Doro, but it's too late to alter that; but some abbreviations are criminal. Anyway, they all give me a lop-sided feeling."

Doro lit a cigarette and handed it to him. Tony had never interfered with his son's habits in any way; if Rex had chosen to go about in woad or taken cognac for breakfast, it is doubtful, firstly, that he would have noticed, and if he had, that he would have made any comment.

Rex's vices, however, were negligible so far, and his smoking had certainly not retarded his growth; he was fifteen, and nearly six feet in height.

Propped up on big pillows he surveyed his room. The firelight flung a wide glow over the white-

pannelled walls. Rex had collected various things he loved from other rooms, and had chosen with discernment. He had a dowry chest beneath one window, and a travelling box on one side of the fireplace which had belonged to an Italian lady of the sixteenth century. It was of brass, studded thickly with nails; a really beautiful thing.

Boxing prints adorned the walls, uncles and great-uncles and other relatives figuring amongst the onlookers in several cases. Portraits of Tommy Burns, Fitzsimmons, and Jem Mace hung between.

Rex's bed was a four-poster with the hangings stripped away and the lovely fluted posts left shining and clear cut.

Through the open windows the soft, moist air blew in and mingled with the scent of Tony's really excellent cigarettes.

"Ring for tea," Rex suggested; "it must be getting pretty late."

He propped himself higher; he had on a rather gorgeous jacket of Indian workmanship which Pembroke had given him from his "stores." Pembroke was sixty, and hale, and selfish, and strangely pleasant; he neglected his own place because it offered poor sport.

Often he gave Doro and Rex gifts, Doro a bracelet, Rex a gun, but always gifts he had had in his possession for some time.

Rex loved his Indian coat; it was of densely blue satin, embroidered in faded golden thread, and had

queer matrix buttons. His face looked rather white above the intense colouring, white and thin.

Emilia came in, followed by Rex's man carrying the tea-tray.

Emilia had not changed with time; she had remained stout, bronze-faced, white of tooth and jolly of smile, and utterly devoted to Doro.

Rex she loved, Doro she adored.

She exclaimed at once now over her "little Sefiorita's" shoes, and knelt down to change them, whilst Doro extended a slender foot, balancing herself by holding on to Rex's hand.

"You're an angel, Nannie," she said with the careless, happy acceptance of a thoroughly spoilt childhood. "And she's to have tea with us, isn't she, Rex?"

"Rather," Rex agreed.

Emilia beamed with pleasure. She loved having both her nurselings under her charge again, however unnecessary her care now might be.

Doro sat down in a big chair and gave a sigh of content.

"Strong as death, sweet as love—three lumps and lemon too, please," she ordered blithely, "and the merest hint of anchovy paste on the butteriest crumpet, Querida, and I think I'll do for a bit!"

Between mouthfuls she asked Rex:

"Glad you haven't to dine down?"

He looked at her for a second, then said:

"Oh, you mean because Pan's coming? Not sorry!"

"There's a hell of a row on," Doro said elegantly.

"Divorce is rotten, anyway," Rex declared aloofly.

"Tony's furious about it all."

Rex gave a little chuckling laugh.

"I suppose he said two sentences and gave up? 'Damn nuisance!' 'Pretty mess.' Or didn't he get sufficiently angry to inspire him to such lengthy eloquence?"

"He feels things awfully, Rex, you've no idea."

"A mutual resemblance at last then. He hasn't many, you'll own!"

Doro flushed gorgeously.

"Being able to talk rather cleverly isn't everything; lots of people who are inarticulate know an awful lot, too."

"Two up," Rex agreed placidly. "You have the honour!"

Tea progressed in peace.

"How long's Pan staying?" Rex asked irrelevantly.

"I don't know till Tony's seen to all this bother, settled it."

"That shouldn't take long," Rex commented blandly. "Father will ask two questions. Pan will answer neither directly, and there remains the subject of allowance! It'll come to that, I'm certain."

"What really happened?"

"Oh, Pan married this girl and then tired of her, and there was a duel or something, and he's been booted out of the Diplomatic, and he's sans income, job, and, I bet, temper!"

"You do hate Pan, don't you?" Doro asked idly.

Rex stirred restlessly. That reserve which cloaks any deep feeling was his to an intense degree.

"Of course not," he said; "it would be childish now."

"And of course we're very grown up now!"

"Oh, I'm awf'ly old for my age," Rex stated gaily.

Light flooded the room as G entered. G with a stick, but no other evidence of submission to the years' sovereignty.

Rex struggled up in bed, his face flushing with delight.

"Darling, how sweet of you to come over!" he said eagerly. "I say, this is a beano! Emilia, ring for China tea, and macaroons; and, Doro, be a sport and fetch those tall roses from the study. G will love to look at them."

G sat down beside him.

"Crooked again?"

He nodded, smiling.

"But worth while, after all, since it brings you to see me! I say, Pan arrives to-night."

"Bad business," G commented briefly.

"I suppose so," Rex agreed soberly. "G, is it very bad?"

"Yes, quite. Unforgivably so, according to our standards."

Doro came back with the roses.

"Look, aren't they adorable?" she asked.

She stood for a moment beneath a hanging light arranging them, and the soft glow flung delicate and beautiful shadows over her face, as she slightly moved her head. She gave an extraordinary impression of goldenness and rose-colour standing there, her hair shone, the translucent greenness of her eyes as she smiled at Rex and G seemed like a happy radiance.

"Very effective, my dear," G said as she put the roses down.

Rex gave a low whistle under his breath. His gaze met G's.

"I thought so, too," she told him, smiling.

"Isn't it queer," he asked a little breathlessly, "the way you seem *suddenly* to notice things?"

G studied him as he looked again at Doro, who was seated on the rug before the fire feeding herself and Nick's grandson, a young gentleman of some eight months, with bits of crumpet, on which, according to minute instructions, the merest "hint" of anchovy paste had been duly spread.

Doro was wearing a shooting-skirt and silk shirt with a severe black tie. Her hair was plaited in one thick plait and tied with a bow equally severe, and she had on heather stockings. Her clothes certainly were not very decorative, and yet, sitting there, the

flames patterning her in gold and scarlet, she gave an impression of youth, and sweetness, and coolness, and fragrance.

Really, her hair was "up"; this stirring event had taken place on her last birthday, and in the evenings Emilia, who had toiled to London to learn the way, dressed it delightfully.

"I'll have to love and leave you, my dears," she said now, looking up from rolling young Nick's ears over her little finger. "Tony told me to be down early. I'll come in when I'm ready, though. I've the rippingest new kit. I got it at Callots, all white and silver, young, but not too young, if you take my meaning, as Pembroke says, and it has distinction! Don't you believe it! Good-bye again."

As the door closed, Rex said:

"G, wasn't it odd, the way we both thought so, at the same minute?"

G had known he would go back to that instant's revelation. She said quietly:

"Telepathy, or, more probably, a similar taste for beauty! Of course, Doro has it. We have always been agreed on that point."

Rex lay back and thought.

"D'you know," he said suddenly, "to-day, sometimes—I can't think why—it seemed different, not newer, but different, stronger?"

"It's Doro's doing!" G suggested lightly.

"I suppose so."

G looked down at his absorbed face. He was gazing intently at the fire; his profile was towards her, a rather thin, rather ascetic profile, very clear cut, fine of line, a firm chin and resolute mouth, the lips close pressed. Anxious love stirred in her heart, roused in some measure by the surprised happiness which had shown in Rex's eyes when he had looked at Doro.

Of course he was only a boy, she a girl.

But the mere thought that he might be unhappy hurt her.

But, heavens! How far-fetched a thought, how very, very problematical!

CHAPTER IX

*"Let this be said between us here,
One love grows green when one turns grey:
This year knows nothing of last year;
To-morrow has no more to say
To yesterday."*

SWINBURNE.

DORO walked downstairs slowly. She was early, and her shoes, of frail brocade, scarlet-heeled, were extremely new and very high.

From the hall, half hidden beneath the shade of a dim, torn banner, Pasquale Greville watched her.

Her loveliness swept like a summer wind across his close, jaded mind.

Doro stopped on the stairs and adjusted a flounce, and Greville thought her skin was whiter than her soft white dress; she looked all whiteness, untouchedness.

He went forward and stood directly under a light; he had done it before and knew the value of a first decorative impression.

He obtained it. Real beauty is so rare, it must be recognized at once; it is impossible to ignore it.

Doro, a being alive to the end of every shining strand of her hair, acknowledged its presence with delight; G's influence, Rex's outlook, her own choice of view, all swayed her now in her admiration.

She enjoyed looking at Greville, and was aware she did.

Then he spoke, and she laughed and coloured, and said:

“Pan!”

Greville caught her hands in his.

“Doro!”

The loosening of their hands took a little while, and Greville did not speak for a moment, then he said:

“Grown up, altogether new!”

“Oh, not altogether,” Doro said rather shyly.

“Well,” he made a quick gesture with his fine tanned hands, “what is one to say then? I remember an Alice in Wonderland and find—Aphrodite.”

“Both begin with an ‘A,’” Doro owned demurely. “*That’s* a resemblance, anyway.”

Greville laughed mechanically; he was swept off his feet utterly by her beauty and youth; he had an extraordinary sense of well-being suddenly; the old discontent, boredom with life, which had encompassed him about during the last years, seemed suddenly to have been dispelled; he knew the sensation well, but he had not experienced it of late.

Doro was studying him; he felt it, and was delighted in his turn.

Actually, she was thinking how strange it was to see a beautiful man, and yet no other word could be used to describe Greville accurately. He had faultless form of head and features; odd, yet attractive,

darkly-golden hazel eyes, and nearly black hair; a skin of fine texture, faintly tanned, and a singularly charming smile.

He was very tall and had the sportsman's figure: flat, broad of shoulder, which gives an expression of strength and grace. To Doro's relief he was extremely well turned out. Tony was rather a grief to her in that respect, Pembroke also, and Rex did not count very much; Greville did, and she liked his sapphire waistcoat-buttons and links, which matched.

And, too, there was about him the undeniable glamour of a wrong romance. Doro was rather in doubt as to why people were divorced, but there clung to Greville, undoubtedly, the suggestion of an unhappy love, which never fails to invest the man or woman with interest: of what nature depends on the person by whom it is felt.

Doro's, of course, was sheerly sentimental, and, it must be owned, Greville was the easiest person possible for whom to feel sentiment in any form. Women had always adored him and spoilt him; he knew to an eyelash the value of his looks.

He had looked forward to this visit with great distaste; only the fact that he had to have money and that only Tony would give it to him had forced him to undertake it.

His marriage, which had taken place ten years earlier, had been an unqualified failure. His poor little Italian Marchesa had suffered too cruelly in

comparison, and Greville had not cared who had known it; he had married her because he had been forced to do so, or leave the Diplomatic. Now, in the end, he had to leave it, and because of her, and, though he had no least affection for it really, he resented having to give up anything without his own volition.

Still, it was an infinite relief to be rid of Bianca, whom once he had likened to Primavera, to Semiramis, to Bice—but not to Aphrodite; he had supplied the godlike looks in that family *a deus*.

He greeted Tony and Pembroke urbanely, and continued to stare at Doro.

They dined in the big dining-room; Tony chose to maintain a certain state, and Greville thought the formal service, the silver plate, the dark table with its purple and white orchids set in feathery, vivid green, a fit setting for Doro.

She sat at one end facing Tony, and the panelling of the walls was a beautiful background for her whiteness.

Greville found himself thinking of her eyes; he had quite forgotten, with regard to colour, that she *had eyes!*

And behold! they were the nth marvel: really green eyes, set below pencil-line black eyebrows.

“Really green!” he kept telling himself, recovering from his amazement with difficulty.

He recalled, whilst apparently listening to some

hunting story of Pembroke's, various verses which were applicable to Doro's green eyes.

Hadn't Baudelaire spoken of "*yeux verdâtres—sorcière aux yeux alléchants?*"

At any rate, some poet had, and some day he would read the poem to Doro.

How old was she, seventeen, eighteen?

Old enough!

Doro rose.

"Better stay and drink with us," Tony suggested.

To Greville's surprise she stayed, but she drank very little, and only twisted the glass of port round before a candle placed near her, watching its rubies reflect on her hand.

"Goin' to sing?" Tony suggested in the drawing-room.

"Do you sing?" Greville asked.

"She's trainin' under Cavini," Tony threw out contemptuously.

Greville opened wide eyes for an instant: Cavini was a maestro; it was an honour to be taught by him.

"I'll do my best," Doro said, seated at the ebony piano. "Darling," to Tony, "what will you have?"

"Anythin', anythin'," Tony said lethargically; "please yourself."

To Greville's amazement she began the opening bars of Grieg's "Time and all Eternity," and when she sang it, her eyes, half unconsciously resting on Greville's face, his looked into hers with every

consciousness. For years, since his youth, he had not felt as he now felt; he realized he was actually trembling, a mist seemed to rise before him, and through it Doro sang on, superbly, gorgeously, without any effort, with the heavenly clearness and lack of emotion a boy's perfect voice holds.

"My God!" Greville said to himself, "when she feels—and sings as she feels . . . !"

The song was finished; he heard Pembroke make some remark, Doro answered it; then she began to sing again, a little song in French, an absurd little song all about a "belle marquise" called Fifinella; she finished the song, laughed, and rose.

"There!"

"Very nice, my dear," Tony said. "That's Cavini, Pan."

"And a very lovely voice," Greville answered coolly.

He turned abruptly to Doro.

"D'you like singing?"

"I adore it."

"And riding too, still?"

She laughed.

"You have a wonderful memory, Pan!"

"Not in some cases," he answered, his golden eyes darkening as he looked at her; "in some cases one cannot forget."

A sudden delicate confusion robbed Doro of the power to reply.

She had a strange sense of being cut off in some way from Tony and Pembroke, of talking in another atmosphere—a keener, more vivid one, with Greville.

He disturbed her thoughts oddly and made her feel, paradoxically, at once older in some ways and much younger in others.

He lit a cigarette now, and with the match cupped in his hand, a little flame of hard light illuminating his face, and making his eyes shine brilliantly, asked in a low voice:

“Why did you flush, Aphrodite?”

“Did I?” Doro asked.

“Yes, most adorably. There must have been a reason.”

Doro lifted grave eyes to his.

“I think I felt shy,” she said; “you see, it is such a long while since you were here——”

“And now I seem different, and you also?” Greville supplemented quickly. “And the difference is rather bewildering, is that it?”

“I suppose so,” Doro murmured.

Tony called to her; she went across to him.

“What are you and Pan muttering about?” he asked.

“Differences in life,” Greville said blandly.

“You should be able to argue on that,” Tony conceded with bluff sarcasm. He jerked his head at Doro:

“Time you were in bed, my dear.”

Greville opened the door for her and followed her to the foot of the wide, shallow stairs. He took her hand.

"Sleep well, Aphrodite! Grow used to the difference! I want you—" his cool grasp tightened suddenly, "I want you to grow very used to me."

He waited until she reached the landing, and Doro had a last impression of him, dark head back-flung, his eyes smiling her "good night."

She paused at Rex's door, then knocked and went in.

"Had a thin time?" Rex asked sympathetically. "I heard you singing and loved it. What's Pan like now; same as ever, I expect?"

Doro did not answer for a moment, and Rex repeated the question a little differently:

"Was Pan pretty sickening? I suppose so. Languidly clever, and unostentatiously indifferent to us, eh?"

"He was quite all right, I think," Doro said constrainedly.

"Tired?"

"Yes, a little; it's been rather a stiff day."

Rex sighed and drew a book from his table.

"Better cut along to bed. Good night."

"Good night."

In her own room, with Emilia undressing her, all her own "little" comfort of atmosphere about her again, she felt less weary, the sense of tautness seemed to have left her; it had been, this evening

downstairs, rather like a lesson of some sort, an ordeal in some way.

When Emilia had gone she slipped into a thick, white silk dressing-gown, banked herself with big cushions, and went to sit in the window-seat before the open lattice window.

The night was so mild it suggested spring; there was in the air that hesitant little breeze, the fragrance of wet moss.

A wood fire, now only a glow, cut by an occasional spear of blue flame, lit the room faintly. Doro gazed out into the night; a restlessness possessed her, and she discovered again and again that her thoughts were of Pan. . . . Men's looks had never seemed to matter before—men, anyway, had not. Men had always been Rex's friends: Richard Colefax, the Carew boys, the Dorringtons. . . .

Perhaps it was because Pan was older that he seemed to count more?

He had lived so much—and the others—the others had always been just where they were, what they were.

She would discuss Pan with G. . . . No, she would not—quite distinctly she realized she would not do that; her motive was obscure, but it was definite.

It had not been easy to say anything about him to Rex even.

Why?

She drew her delicate brows together; her whole

mind felt tense with perplexity, which yet had an element of happiness in it.

It was so strange that the meeting itself and the fact of its occurrence impressed her so—and made her feel she could not sleep!

The vision of Pan, standing beneath the light, came to her again, and then again the thought returned, so inevitably attractive to youth, of the mystery in his life.

What had really happened about his marriage; how unhappy had he been?

She felt sure he had not been the first to whom blame could be attached, anyway.

A guard of defence for him leapt to instant being in her thoughts.

Had he been very unhappy? Had he loved Bianca very deeply?

For years Pan had been merely a name. He had been in Berlin, in Bucharest, in Paris often; he had married an Italian girl, he had left her, he was returning to England.

That had been all, and Doro had listened very vaguely.

Now he had come into her life, an entirely new being, and thereby had accrued to him the weight of much novelty, the benefit of forming her impressions.

Doro went to her dressing-table for a handkerchief. Her own reflection caught her gaze in the

oval mirror. She studied herself with a new absorbed interest.

Was she beautiful—really—honestly?

Her mind still practised the childish formula—honestly?

She gave a little shy smile at her own reflection, and her eyes smiled back at her. Rex had said they were like jasmine flowers and leaves. She leant forward, and the light from the electric candles lit a little star in the deep greenness. *Were* green eyes so wonderful?

She hoped so, with a deep sigh.

Just now they had shadows of weariness under them, leaf shadows on the magnolia petal of her skin.

She threw up both slender white arms and sighed again.

It was a good world, a world full of sport and general splendidness—but—somehow——

She switched off the lights, and slipped into bed. Anyway, to-morrow was near, and that was, for some secret reason her heart would not quite acknowledge, rather wonderful.

A last memory of Pan came to her, and she wondered if he were asleep, and wondering, slept herself.

At that instant Greville was lighting a last cigarette as he stood before the fire in his room. It was his own old room and, as a matter of course, was always prepared for him when he visited Hurst point.

To-night he thought of the last time he had slept there, years before.

It was not a very pleasing reflection, so much had happened since then, so much which had been uncomfortable and disturbing, and the "before time" of memory should be of the sun-dial type, which only counts the happy hours! Greville stirred the fire with a slippered foot, frowning a little, and the flames leapt up gaily. Reflection concerning the last decade of his life made him think with ironical amusement of a certain popular song, with its suggestion of a varied affection for fair ladies as different. . . . Farkoa had sung it, or someone else; it really did not matter, but its subject was familiar!

Forty!

He met the thought with a quick squaring of the shoulders and a little covert smile—forty, and free to enter the lists again! By God, he would be careful this time; this separation had cost him the remainder of his income. It was an unpleasing thought, but he was not unduly distressed by it. Rexford was an extremely wealthy man, and he would give him a reasonable allowance, Greville felt convinced, if only because of his abhorrence of any family scandal.

Rexford could leave his money as he liked, pretty well, too.

Already Greville had sensed to whom Tony gave affection.

It was not amazing!

God, what absolute sheer beauty Doro had! A winner beyond question.

Extraordinary combination of colouring, that burnished sort of hair, and that white skin, and such eyes—and with it all, utterly young, utterly impressionable.

He smiled a little now as he remembered Doro's "shy" flush, her delightful confusion when he had asked its reason.

What a heavenly task to rouse Selene, to watch the adorable growth of consciousness, to note the birth of response to an emotional influence—it would be like studying a bud opening its petals slowly, slowly, utterly delightful in its unconscious surrender. . . . The thought burnt like a swift fire in his brain for a moment.

After all, why not?

But he would have to go slowly. Doro's upbringing had held no hothouse element apparently! Anything but, he was forced to conclude upon reflection.

But if not, there was her voice to explain: that voice which held within its note the promise of a passionate heart. . . . A voice like that, allied to such youngness and loveliness!

What a land of amazing promise and mystery for an explorer, what heavenly labour to wake sleeping emotion, to give colour to that voice!

He caught his breath sharply; it had been so long, owing to the tedious exigencies of the hour,

since he had experienced a love affair. And to find one here, at Hurstpoint, of all places!

He drew on his cigarette until it flamed deeply.

If it might not be an affair of moment, Doro's presence would make his stay a very different event from that he had been prepared to endure.

At any rate, even if nothing matured, it would be pleasant to wile away the days with Doro, instead of being left to the tender mercies of Tony. Gad, what a boor—and bore!

He looked at his watch. He, too, meant to hunt the following day. His glance caught the sharp colour of his pink coat, which his man had laid out for him. Time to turn in if he meant to turn out in decent time.

As it was he overslept, and ran downstairs, gulped some scalding tea, and was barely able to catch Doro up at the house field.

He hallooed to her gaily; the sun was just breaking through; he felt admirably fit, and he was quite aware he looked it; and certainly Doro looked a great deal more than merely fit!

She was riding near Tony, who greeted Pan with a jerk of his head.

Pan edged close to Doro. A fine little smile had curved his lips for an instant after he had met her glance.

It was such a shy little glance—shy, and admiring, and happy.

He felt suddenly extraordinarily gay, at one with the keenness of the day, the joy of sport, all the *élan* of the hour.

A soft big wind blew the sodden leaves about, the sky hung low, its pale blueness shielded by banks of dove-coloured clouds; every single detail of the landscape seemed to stand out as if it had been etched; the lovely bareness of the trees as they reared themselves back from the caresses of the blustering wind was cut against the delicate sky in straight, graceful lines, a witchery of myriad-patterned lace-woven branches.

"Oh, it's good, it's divine to be alive and riding, and so happy," Doro's heart sang to her; all her youth tingled with the sheer joy of living this soft, clean day.

Last night seemed far away, and yet still wonderful.

Tony, riding behind her, urging forward, caught a glimpse of her rapt face, its colour whipped to keenest shell-pink, and unconsciously his hard mouth softened.

All his obstinate pride centred in Doro. It was a secret pride, and because of that, more strong.

Rex had never managed to matter much; the lad was always ailing, and when he was fit he was so damn silent, kept himself to himself, and the old grudge had never died, never would die . . . but Doro . . .

Occasionally Tony thought plans for her, very

rarely; he was content to accept the good moment, and Doro was so young.

He said huskily to Pembroke, who was passing him:

“All right, eh?” his bloodshot eyes on Doro.

Pembroke shared his admiration, whilst reserving an appreciation of Rex.

He nodded now and said bluffly:

“A winner, Tony, a winner, hands down.”

Pan cut out of the field and bore down; both men watched him; Tony's face lowered.

He rode straight to Doro and they raced ahead together.

Pembroke, removing his shrewd eyes from Tony, wheeled away swiftly.

CHAPTER X

*" I put my soul into your eyes;
I looked, I saw, and did not see
My own soul looking back at me."*

ARTHUR SYMONS.

*" Only thoughts of you remain
In my heart where they have lain.
Perfumed thoughts of you, remaining
A tired sweetness in my brain.
Others leave me: all things leave me,
You remain."*

FEW people have the gift of withdrawal when they desire to attain, fewer still (and it is not an admirable quality) the power to stabilize the moment; subtlety is required to achieve that condition, and subtlety rarely yokes with selflessness; nearly always a subtle love imposes sacrifice.

Greville played on Doro's nature like wind on flame; he was vastly intrigued himself, but he had no least wish to transform intrigue into action; for him the hazard of the game was a great charm. . . .

Doro, hesitant, nervous, delightfully young, was swept from one mood to another by Pan's attentions, his lack of them, by the endlessly disturbing sense of "waiting" which never left her.

She could have told no one what she felt; luckily there was no one to watch her very closely. Rex

was ill for rather a long time; G was generally with him, and Tony and Pembroke were immersed in the season's sport, which gave little opportunity for scrutiny of subtlety.

Often Pan vanished to town for week-ends, and then Doro knew how the time dragged.

Consciously, she never said to herself at this time, "This is love." Love had held so small place in her life as a subject to be brought for examination.

But she waited with a sickening sense of suspense for the arrival of the car when it had gone in to meet the six o'clock train. Often Pan did not come when he had said he would, and then, when she had waited in the hall and learnt of his non-arrival, she would slip away upstairs to her own sitting-room, and sit there in the twilight until Emilia came to dress her for dinner.

She was not really unhappy; the "waiting" sense was an excitement, every hour held some promise.

Whimsically, watching the drive one day at post time, for Pan had written occasionally from town, and this was during a visit there, she thought of the magic of the postman; until Pan's advent he had been John Thomas from the forge, now he was either heaven's messenger, or a heartless old man who might as well never have been born!

Pan motored down for Christmas, however, arriving on Christmas Eve laden with gifts, books for Rex, a tiny diamond wrist-watch on a green ribbon

with an emerald clasp for Doro, appropriate gifts for all.

He came into the big hall, exclaiming at the cold, declaring he was frozen, but looking fit and smart.

He sat down beside Doro; so close to her that the sleeve of his coat touched her arm.

"Glad to see me?" he asked in a voice only she could hear.

A wild shyness prevented her answering.

"Aren't you?" Pan teased softly. "Hard-hearted being! And I have thought of meeting you, only that, all the way down in the car. The cold didn't matter because of that thought; it was like a fire and kept me warm."

He held out his hands to the real fire now, and the keen flame shone through their lean fineness.

Doro felt a frantic longing to put out her hand, too, and twine her fingers in those other long ones. She stole a glance at Pan's bent head, on which the firelight glowed, making his dark hair glitter a little.

At last she said very shyly:

"I am so glad you came for Christmas, after all."

Pan laughed. He had that laugh which can hurt, which is on a note of mockery, of disbelief, it seems always.

"I am indeed honoured," he said lightly.

All Doro's lit happiness was extinguished by his voice; it fell away to a little heap of desolate ash, vain hopes burnt out.

She rose with a murmur of some duty as hostess; her one desire was to save her pathetic little dignity. Then as she moved she trembled uncontrollably, for Pan's hand had slid down and clasped hers, his fingers twined closely in her own.

For an instant the hall, the huge leaping fire, every familiar sight and sound vanished; she felt physically faint with an overwhelming joy, and deep in her heart she asked piteously:

“What happened—what happened?”

Rex sauntered across, her hand was freed; but as Pan's fingers loosed her own, again that wonderful dizzying sweetness swept over her, and she wanted to whisper, “Ah! don't take your hand away—don't go, don't go.”

“Rather in the dark over here, aren't you?” Rex's voice asked. “One moment.” He leant across, and a light leapt to being; he fetched cake for Doro, and waited beside her and Pan.

“Had a good time in town?” he asked Pan.

“Thanks, yes. Are you better?”

“Oh, yes; nearly all right. I mean to hunt next week.”

“And when do you go back to school?”

Rex laughed. He knew quite well that Pan was aware he had had to leave Eton because of his health, and the question genuinely amused him because he penetrated its reason.

“I don't. I stay here”—he smiled his peculiarly

attractive smile, glancing at Doro—"and look after Doro."

Doro protested, of course; laughed nervously. To himself Pan said, "The damned young cub saw—how much will he suspect?"

He met Rex's clear, rather aloof gaze with a hard stare; he might gibe with hidden dislike at Rex, but he acknowledged him no mean opponent. There was about Rex an effect of serenity; he gave the impression of one who had a real sense of the dignity of life, despite his youth.

As he leant up against one side of the high fireplace, his slight tall figure outlined against the grey stone wall with its heavy design, he was nearly as tall as Pan, and he had the same narrow virile hands and feet, the same breadth of shoulder. He stayed beside Pan and Doro, smoking imperturbably until the dressing bell rang.

"Get a move on, Doro," he said then. "We've a crowd dining, and we must be down."

He slid an arm through Doro's and led her away.

Pan watched them, his eyes narrowed. . . .

But he had his moment later, when Doro came down early (he had known she would be early!) wearing a white chiffon frock with a silver sash and her first pearls, Tony's gift to her; they lay like clouded stars at dawn upon the faint rise of her white breast.

"This," she told Pan, touching them, "is an event; did you know? Oh, but yes! For we live for

the first string of pearls, the real kind, not just seed ones. When we attain the real ones we're grown up!"

"No pearls, no jewels ever made could make you more beautiful than you are," Pan said very low.

"Oh!" Doro said almost in a whisper; her colour sped and returned under his words, like soft flames driven by the wind.

Pan felt himself a little shaken; again and again he had realized there was a danger. Doro was too vivid, too sensitive; he would need more control if he went far in this white yet so intriguing passion. His mouth felt a little dry now. He was seized suddenly by an almost uncontrollable impulse to kiss Doro; he mastered himself with an effort, a visible one, for he paled.

"What is it?" Doro asked, her hand upon his arm.

At that instant Tony appeared on the landing. He bulked there blackly, his heavy face immobile, but his small, deep-set eyes glowed for a moment.

Then he came down, treading very softly.

"Admirin' Doro's pearls, Pan?" he asked, halting beside her.

"They are lovely," Pan answered too quickly.

"She becomes 'em," Tony said in his rather hoarse voice. He stopped speaking a moment, then added broadly: "Wonder how many girls you've given pearls to, Pan, eh?"

Then, chuckling huskily, he drew Doro on with him towards the drawing-room.

She was nearly as tall as he, and he glanced at her with needle-point scrutiny.

By God, had Pan made an impression—already?

His dark face purpled at the thought.

Pan, with his list of amours, his rotten cheap marriage, dishonourable attempt at divorce. . . .

He said abruptly to Doro:

“Run up to G and tell her I want her, will you?”

Pan had entered the room. He sat down now in a big chair and drew an illustrated towards him.

Tony waited until Doro had disappeared, then he crossed the room.

He stood beside Pan, looking down at him with his impassive stare. Finally he said:

“I may be wrong. I hope I am. If I am not, then, by God, you may go a beggar. D’you hear?”

“What on earth?” Pan asked indifferently, but his eyelids flickered.

“You know all right,” Tony said, his voice short as if with suppressed savagery, “and I know you know. One look at Doro that you should not give and—you go.”

“I suppose,” Pan said with assumed indolence, “it would be quite useless for me to tell you that your—er—what shall one call them—suspicions seems too important a word for an idea so foolish—are entirely unfounded?”

Tony gave a short laugh. He said nothing, but stared at Pan, an ugly little smile on his lips, the hot glow in his eyes.

"I've told you," he said contemptuously; "you can take it I mean it." He swung round with amazing swiftness for so big a man. "Hands off—or no allowance."

He walked to the fireplace, cut a cigar carefully, and lit it.

To himself Pan was saying in inarticulate fury: "Damn you, damn you, damn you."

He laboured under no delusion with regard to Rexford's outlook; what he said he would do, he would do.

Doro came back. She was singing *Carmen* softly; she danced into the room, her eyes seeking Pan, the words, "*Si je t'aime prends garde à toi!*" a challenge, a declaration to him.

She danced with muted castanets, her slender hands making every gesture; and she danced as Spanish women do with the lithe sway of the body, like the stem of a flower bending.

"Tony, I'll be an opera singer yet," she cried gaily; "darling, I will. Cavini says"—she used her hands, imitating the Italian's florid manner—"Ah, but you are dee-vine—a little later, yes—you could startle the worrld!' Think of it, Antonio, mio!"

"Rather not," Tony said grimly.

Rex came in, and Doro showed him the pearls; he glowed responsively.

"Oh, I say! How ripping, Doro!" He turned to his father, using almost his own words: "She becomes them, sir, doesn't she?"

G, resplendent in black velvet and diamonds, sat down at the piano and began to play an old-fashioned polka.

"Come on, Doro," Rex urged.

They danced away together, Rex's limp scarcely evident.

"'See me dance the polka,'" he sang absurdly. "G, what hearts have unburdened themselves to you to this sprightly step?"

Doro's eyes sought Pan persistently, but he did not glance at her.

One of love's "little fears" entered her heart, chilling its warm happiness.

What had happened, on this day of all days? All through the long dinner she tried to meet his glance; he would not look at her.

But others did. Richard Colefax, down from his first term at Magdalen, pre-eminently therefore a "blood," a man of the world, paid her extravagant compliments, drank to her incessantly, his ardent boyish face pale, his eyes aflame. Doro drank with him, or with Christopher Arundel, whose dark satiric face glowed on her. She had to divide her dances. Pan had asked for none.

Again and again she danced past him, saw him, yet feigned an utter unobservance.

In one of the conservatories Richard Colefax caught her hand.

"Oh I say, Doro"—his voice was trembling—"you—you're so—so utterly lovely—Doro!"

His clasp was compelling, but Doro drew back.

Here was no swift fire leaping from hand to hand, no wonderful maddening thrill which seemed to sweep one's soul towards a passionate paradise. Richard seemed like a toy, a marionette dancing steps which were jerked from it by an unknown power, and he did not matter, he did not count.

She led him back to the ballroom by the promise of the next dance. Pan was near the door, and now, for one full instant, Doro's eyes and his met; his glance swerved to young Richard's white, set face, and Doro saw his eyes narrow as she had noticed they did only in moments of tension.

An unreasoning sense of triumph filled her, an insane recklessness seemed to blaze up in the over-excited mind.

"Ah! don't you want to dance with me, Richard?" she asked softly, allure in her every gesture, every tone of her voice.

"You know I do," he said vehemently. His arm went round her, more closely than it need have done, and deliberately, her gaze still on Pan, she leant her head so near Richard's shoulder that his lips touched her hair.

She stopped dancing when they neared Pan again and walked slowly past him, talking with Richard.

But, again in the conservatory, all the unnatural triumph fled.

"I am so tired, Richard," she said tonelessly.

"I'll get you some champagne," he answered quickly; "I won't be long. I saw a footman a moment ago."

As he left the conservatory Pan entered it; he was smiling the little "fine" smile which gave his face in some strange way a sharper outline. He crossed to Doro, his lithe tread noiseless on the marble floor, and stood before her.

"We can hear the band from here," he said unemotionally. "Will you not finish this with me? I have indeed been on short commons to-night! Aphrodite neglects her faithful subjects, I am inclined to think! The old law, familiarity, and so forth!"

That bitter-sweet hurtness at his neglect which had throbbled through her all the evening held Doro silent.

She rose and let Pan dance with her; the music came to them very faintly; often they lost it as they danced almost noiselessly under the deeply drooping palms; somewhere a fountain played, and its fall and ripple were audible as they went close to it; the conservatory was like a summer night after rain, as humid, as adorably fragrant of bruised leaves and growing flowers, and rich earth. . . .

It seemed to Doro as though, once in Pan's arms, all pain and misery vanished, as if his touch held

supreme happiness. She breathed in little panting sighs, her lips parted, her eyes wide, almost imploring. And once she drew Pan closer involuntarily, and under that slight pressure his blood quickened fiercely.

He answered it by drawing her nearer; and, at the contact of her slender sweetness, the vision of her face, drained now of its rose colour, but lovely with a pale loveliness which intoxicated him, he bent his head and kissed those parted lips, drawing between his own the fluttering breath which came and went.

“Doro!” he whispered.

She did not answer, only her eyes—mystic, rapt—fell beneath his glance, those white eyelids, so like white wings, were as an emblem of adoring surrender. He kissed them, kissed the line of her burnished hair where it sprang away so vitally from her brow, kissed the dark eyelashes, and reached her lips again.

Endless seemed those kisses which took and took, which seemed to Doro to sink into her very soul, to drain her being into Pan's.

There was a sound, faint, yet Pan heard it, and in one second Doro found herself released, and Pan was calling Richard's name urbanely. Unconsciously, she put out a hand and caught at the edge of the marble rim of the wide basin which held the fountain; above her, about her, around her, there

seemed a mystery of golden tracery, of waving leaves, of falling water like a silver veil.

She heard Richard's voice as if from very far away.

"You must drink this—you are faint."

Mechanically she put her lips to the glass he held and drank.

The trees became vast palms again, the fountain was only a silver thread which rose and fell, she could hear the echo of the music.

"I say"—Richard's voice came to her—"you are simply dead tired, Doro. You mustn't dance any more. We'll sit it out."

"I—I think if you don't mind I'll go to my room," Doro said; "if you don't mind, Richard."

He accompanied her to the foot of the stairs and watched her out of sight.

Her own room was dark, and cool, and still. She stood beside the window with closed eyes. It had really happened—it had been no dream of a restlessly sweet night—Pan and she had kissed—he *did* love her . . . he did . . . all the fears and doubts were over, he loved her . . . her wonderful dream god—her king. . . . Oh, that to-night could ever pass—oh! that it might have lasted for ever . . . they two together at last . . . and all the happy-unhappy strangeness done away with for ever.

Oh! to die now—utterly, utterly happy, with only the memory of Pan's eyes gazing into hers, Pan's lips drinking in her soul's love.

Her utter inexperience of love strove with the flame-like nature of her adoration. Her mind seemed as if it were lit by a tired blaze, its thoughts caressed her, steeped her being in a golden warmth.

She slipped suddenly on to the deep window-seat and, like a child, put her head down on her outstretched arms.

It was as if a violent storm had swept over her and still, despite its passing, she lay spent and exhausted by it; the "clear shining" was yet to come.

She confused herself, was shy with herself, triumphant, heavenly happy and yet afraid. Oh! to have kept those moments, to live them again——!

To feel again in reality the wild rapture of that first kiss of her whole life, to live it through again, though whilst it had lasted she had wondered if she were not dying in the ecstasy of passion which had thrilled through her.

Some tiny voice had said within her: "This is the end—this is the end!"

Then they had kissed again, and all that rapture which had seemed as if it must break her heart by its dominion had swept over her anew. Even now, under her hand, her heart beat as if it would escape its bondage. . . .

The door opened very, very cautiously. Doro leant up, her hands pressed down on either side, wide-eyed, listening.

And Pan's voice, *Pan's*, said: "Doro!"

She had reached his arms before the word had wholly left his lips.

In the darkness Pan's face went ashen; he held her to him in an embrace which was madness, as fiercely he put her away from him.

"I came," he said, stumbling on his words, such words making his lips stiff in such an hour, "to—to—Doro, we mustn't speak of this—loving one another—yet. Do you understand? Rexford—he'd be furious. Promise me . . . it shall be a secret—our secret——"

"Oh, I promise, our heavenly secret—the secret of your heart and mine! Kiss me again, only kiss me again!"

Still he drew back, a confused feeling, which had in it, miraculously, pity, surging over him.

Doro's lips brushed his, such a fugitive "young" little kiss from one who knew no other kisses, but, ah! who longed to learn. And she laughed a tiny frightened little laugh after it, her hands on his shoulders, all her white sweetness offering itself to him so anxiously.

The world, their world seemed unutterably far away; for them there was but "the hiding and receiving night" as empire, and for music the beating of their hearts.

Pan rested his hand upon Doro's heart.

"Is it mine?"

"It is all yours."

And he felt it leap and strain beneath his hand as if to reach him actually; for an instant he thought of holding a dove within his hand, and feeling its life-throb so.

He put his other arm about her, and with it drew her to him in an embrace which, for Doro, robbed Heaven of its hopes, its glories, its revelation.

Her very life seemed to float between her lips to lose itself in Pan's love; she felt as if she swooned in ecstasy, half-magic pain, half-endless rapture.

Thoughts like golden falling stars flashed through her mind, a world she had never dreamt could be seemed to open before her eyes. Dimly, dimly, Pan's voice reached her.

"I love you—I love you." . . .

A door closed, and he had left her, left her with a kiss half kissed upon her parted longing lips.

"Pan!" she cried in a little broken whisper.

There was no answer—only the wind blew the curtains gently inward, and they rippled like a tiny wave upon the wainscoating.

He had gone—it was over.

She walked to the window again, and found that she was trembling so that even those few steps were quite uncertain. But the window-seat received her kindly, and she crouched down on it, her head pillowed on her arm, her face upturned to the blue-black sky with its mail of silver.

The night was not very cold; the wind had changed since sunset and now blew softly; a cloud

obscured the moon and the world was hid in soft, shielding darkness.

Never before had the night seemed wonderful, amazing, new almost, as it did now.

But now—now suddenly it was the time of love, the time when there need be no more concealing, no more hesitation.

“Oh, I live, I live!” Doro told herself. “And oh! the rest of time is mine to love him—Pan—Pan.”

CHAPTER XI

*"Passion and heart's desire,
All of youth's splendid fire
To you alone I gave.
I bade red roses wave,
I raised a monument
To mark the way you went. . . ."*

THE morning was an ordeal. Doro kept Emilia with her a long while; twice she changed her frock. At last it was impossible to linger any longer, however much her shyness deepened. She clasped Tony's pearls round her throat and ran downstairs.

And, after all, she need not have felt so nervous. Pan was not there!

Rex was waiting for her. He got her hot toast and coffee, and inquired about each little dish which stood above its flame.

"Just this," Doro said.

"Saving up for dinner?" Rex inquired.

"Yes!"

They laughed.

"Where did you get to?" Rex asked next. "Last night, I mean? I hunted everywhere for you till Colefax told me with a superior air that he had advised you to rest! I say, Doro, old Dickie has also gone up—up the pole, or to the stars, or wher-

ever you like to call the ascent towards true love! He raves, he dithers. What d'you think of him?"

He spoke lightly, but his eyes were serious.

"Oh, I don't think at all," Doro answered.

"We'll see no end of him this vac, though."

He sat down on the broad leather fender-seat.

"I say, Doro, I wonder who you will marry?"

Doro felt the colour race to her face. She said confusedly:

"Oh, don't be an idiot, Rex!"

The door opened and Pan came in.

"We were discussing Doro's marriage," Rex said urbanely. "What's your view on this momentous question, Pan?"

"Does our view, yours or mine matter? Isn't our outlook arranged for us, doled out to us by that of Doro?" Pan answered. He searched amongst the silver dishes leisurely.

Rex hung on; Doro stood by the fireplace. At last Pan rose. Doro waited now with a sense of almost suffocating tension. Pan spoke to Rex.

"Coming for a tramp? One must do something on this sort of day!"

"Thanks, I don't think I will. I want to save myself for hunting next week."

"I'll come," Doro said.

"Good; I'll be down in a few minutes."

Doro went off too, to have her boots put on. Rex stayed beside the fire; he smiled to himself; the smile matched the bleak dreariness of the day.

He was thinking: "He knows I can't walk much yet; he only asked me because he knew——"

Outside, cutting across the short, hard grass, Pan said:

"You played up very well!"

"Played up?" Doro's eyes were wide.

"I meant you to break in just as you did."

"Then I'm glad I did, but I didn't know. I"—she flashed an enchanting smile at Pan—"I had to be alone with you, I felt, and this seemed such a chance."

"Oh youth!" Pan's "morning after" soul sighed within him; he deplored this blatant frankness; intrigue to him was one of the joys of a love affair. To be unconscious of its very existence, and to admit one's crime——!

It was indeed the morning after in good earnest!

Yet, as he glanced at Doro the day seemed fairer; she was so slight and sweet, a somehow splendid thing in her boyish tweeds, a felt hat crammed down on her bright hair, an absurd little jay feather thrust into its black ribbon, her eyes holding stars within their depths as she met his glance.

She thrust a gloved hand through his arm.

"Pan——"

He looked back at the house to see if they could be glimpsed, decided not, and pressed the hand resting on his arm.

Gorgeous rose-colour flamed in Doro's face.

"Oh, Pan—I thought you had forgotten—and it

really happened! I keep telling myself that. I say: 'It really happened—it happened—he loves me, he *kissed* me.' Pan——”

“Yes, Aphrodite?”

“Pan, couldn't you? Just a little baby one, even if it is morning time?” It's Christmas time, too, when one is expected to be generous!”

Her eager, so untouched vividness thrilled him despite the “after” mood, his caution, his resolution to “slow back.”

Yet, even so, he drew Doro towards the little copse Tony had just planted, and kissed her there between the little innocent silver beech trees which afforded, after all, scant protection, and needed it themselves, indeed!

In this white light, a stable clock chiming eleven somewhere, Pan felt out of tune with kissing; a winter's morning, walking over stubble-land, was not the hour or place for romance.

Or only untried youth could find it so!

And now Doro asked:

“Why must we be secret about loving, Pan?”

Pan gave a little laugh which held no amusement.

“Because Rexford decrees it.”

“But how did he know? *We* didn't till—till we kissed. If I just told him, he'd be all right.”

Pan stopped in his stride; he stood before Doro holding her hands.

“Look here, you mustn't tell Rexford. I cannot explain yet; later I will. But give me your word

our secret shall be ours till I set you free from your promise."

"I promise, Pan."

Her face was lifted to his, he bent and kissed the cool mouth which was so near, and then, despite the winter morn and stubble-land, kissed it again and again, until its coldness changed to soft flame which lit his being to passion.

Beneath the white arc of the hard sky they stood and kissed, hands entwined, dark head and shining head leaning to one another.

They stood so still that a rabbit, which had come up to take a breath of fresh air, sat and watched them carelessly, and a robin near by broke into gay singing.

From a distant hill, Tony, riding back slowly from Pointers, saw their two figures. He pulled up his horse; his sight was keen, his range long; he sat on the hill gazing and thinking.

An anger like a choking fever seized him; he panted for breath, and pulled with twitching fingers at his soft stock; his face grew purple, his lips had a bluish line about them.

He watched until the two figures drew apart, then he wheeled his horse and rode towards the house.

Doro said to Pan, her voice divinely shaken:

"Oh, Pan—Pan—I love you—I love you!"

Her eyes roamed beyond him, and she saw the absurd rabbit.

"Eavesdropper!" she laughed deliciously.

Pan had changed colour; he swung round violently, and saw a glint of grey fur.

Doro explained.

But he seemed rather distraught; in his mind he was telling himself it was "devilish open thereabouts—whatever induced me——?"

Still, after all, kissing a pretty girl was not a crime!

If Doro came by no greater hurt than his kisses, her life would not be one of deep distress!

Rexford was a surley old fool; his dog-in-the-manger attitude was ridiculous. Did he suppose a girl like Doro, a girl quick with southern fire and longing, was likely to go through life unknissed?

At that instant in his business room, to which he retreated whenever he wished to think (interpret sleep—generally), Tony was pacing up and down, his teeth shut on a pipe, his big hands locked behind his back.

As Pan had thought with cynical, cheap disparagement of Doro's youth, its promise, the penalties life might exact from it, so Tony thought of her as a little girl, shod in emerald-green, as a bigger girl riding for the first time beside him, racing to him on her fifteenth birthday, and hugging him wildly for his gift of a hunter. . . .

Pan touching that straight sweetness, soiling it with his caresses. . . .

By God—he caught a glimpse of himself in a tiny old mirror, and he stood still, staring.

Did he really look like that?

He made a singular effort and controlled his anger.

For one second he had felt the power of his two hands as if, in reality, he had held Pan's throat between them, and that sudden vision of himself in the little mirror had shown him the savage in himself.

All his interest in women, since Francesca's death, had come to centre in Doro; peculiarly his, from the very first, he had felt even when he had learnt of Rex's coming, that no other child would quite take her place with him.

Francesca's death had deepened the belonging between them, and perhaps because Doro had been so much the desire of his dream, the embodiment of his longing, she had seemed more his than the actual flesh of his flesh had done.

So much gaiety of life, gladness had come with her—and, as well, the attainment of his will; that counted too!

Soiled, spoilt by Pan—a man he despised, and with every reason; the old furious resentment flared up in him again.

He rose from his deep chair and plodded heavily to the window. Ah! He saw them; they were crossing the park; they would be in soon. He rang and gave orders. Mr. Greville was to be sent to him as soon as he returned. Then he waited.

Pan came in on light feet, armed with suspicion, but outwardly careless.

Tony said to him :

“ I saw you in the east plantation.”

Pan made no answer ; he was debating his best course, and he found no easy choice.

Tony kicked a log into place violently, wheeled, faced him again.

“ You will be called to town, en route for Paris,” he said harshly. “ I suppose a wire can reach you to-morrow ? ”

“ My dear chap ! ” Pan murmured. He took out his cigarette-case and chose a cigarette.

A great weight settled down on Tony's heart.

“ Well ? ” he demanded on too sharp a note.

Pan permitted himself a smile.

“ I am not enamoured of Hurstpoint,” he said smoothly, “ but I resent being booted out of it. And Paris is so rowdy at the New Year. Besides ”—his brilliant eyes had been studying Tony's face—“ whatever you do, or do not do, my dear Tony, the issue of this matter rests with me.”

He saw Tony's hands clench and unclench.

As if brute strength could match subtlety !

The little contemptuous smile flickered across his lips again.

“ Why should not Doro love me ? ” he asked quietly. “ I may get free.”

Tony took a step towards him and stopped.

“Love you?” he echoed thickly. “You? By gad, you ask me that, knowing I know, knowing *all* I know.” He moved his head once from side to side as if he were in pain, then turned away and stared out for a very long time at the winter-bound land.

The issue lay with Pan—that was true.

Unless Pan chose—could be *made* to choose to give Doro up entirely, could be forced, made to accept his decision!

Humiliation at his powerlessness dragged at Tony’s stubborn heart. He swung round on Pan with sudden force.

“If you will go to Paris to-morrow, swear not to write—make Doro think you have simply forgotten, I will double your allowance.”

They eyed one another for an instant.

“If you stay you will not receive one penny,” Tony finished dully.

“And to beg, I am ashamed!” Pan quoted with sneering bitterness.

“You have the choice,” Tony returned implacably.

Pan looked at him between narrowed lids, hating him with an intensity which surprised himself. His mind broke its thought upon the treadmill of his anxiety to find a way out, and yet save himself.

He had been covered, and had no weapon wherewith to fight.

What would it profit him to refuse? Rexford

would turn him out of Hurstpoint, Doro be inaccessible. . . .

His smarting vanity seized on these facts; they held by their very naturalness and unavoidable truth, their inaccessible obviousness, some balm of healing for him.

Only a fool battled for a cause already lost.

He met Tony's savage stare and shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"You make a vast to-do about nothing. Very well, I consent."

They looked again at one another, and after a pause Pan went out.

He carried with him a sense of humiliation which was like a poisoned goad. If Tony had felt murderous towards him, he felt towards Tony a desire to stab in the dark, and stab again.

Doro was singing in the music-room. He could hear her voice as if no corridor nor wing of the house intervened.

She was singing an Italian song, a thing of warmth, and sheerly delightful prettiness.

His heart beat suffocatingly for an instant as he stood there listening; he had meant Doro to be a passing affair, his intercourse with her a trifle of charming words, a kiss or two—no more. He had the sense, in that empty corridor, of having thought to step down a safe stairway, and of finding himself poised, hanging by his hands to one frail support, above a void.

He had always withdrawn himself so easily before there had been a scene. He had left, and quite simply, for him, the affair had been ended.

But this time?

Doro sang on. She had chosen a little French song, and faintly the words reached Pan. He knew them, of course.

“Seule, elle peut mon mal guérir——”

He visioned her so easily, that slim white throat back flung, the shining head and translucent green eyes, her parted scarlet lips—all his, all his for the taking; more his than she knew herself, more than he had the right to think.

But he did think. He let his mind dwell on that thought whilst Doro sang; and baffled, hungry anger grew in him, dominated him.

Thoughts which were abominable came to him, thoughts without honour, of infinite baseness.

It lay within his will still to beat down Rexford's power to the lowest dust, to force him to terms.

God! to do that, to smash that hellish pride to atoms!

He waited a little longer, his darkly golden eyes opaque between their heavy lids, then he went on to the music-room.

He saw only Doro in it; he did not see the convex mirror hanging directly above the piano, which reflected her face. In a chair, hidden away, Rex was

lying listening, watching Doro as she sang, in the mirror above her head.

He saw Pan's face, he saw Doro's eyes as she met that glance of Pan's.

He got up instantly so that they might both realize his presence, though Doro, of course, had known he was there.

He waited a moment, made some pleasantly trivial remark, then sauntered away. One of those odd fancies which drift across one's mind when it is distressed came to him to seek refuge in his father's workroom.

He walked along to it, Nick III beside him.

His father rose at his entrance.

"Sorry," Rex said, "I didn't know you were here. I was just—just mouching about."

Tony nodded. He glanced at his son, away from him.

He asked him jerkily:

"Seen Doro?"

"She's in the music-room—was a minute ago."

"Seen Greville?"

"He came into the room as I left."

Tony shot him another hard stare, absently patted Nick, and after a moment's hesitation walked out.

Rex took Nick's head between his hands.

"He wanted to tell me something, old man," he said; "he'd have liked to, but he's so dashed shut-in he can't speak easily when he's bothered. Nick, old

son, it's Doro and that beast Greville. What'll we do about it?"

Nick snuggled against his ankle.

"Because he's a greasy swine," Rex went on gently; "that describes him, old son; he's all that and more. I've heard men speak of him now and again, and when men do say anything—well, it's generally long after they might have done."

He stood up, and Nick sprang on to Tony's so-called writing-table, and gazed eagerly out of the window, too.

"Of course, I can't be just to him because I hate him," Rex said. "I did as a kid, and a kid's likes and dislikes are amazingly sound, I've come to think. They know, and haven't any further trouble about it, whilst when we're grown up we're influenced by outside considerations, we weigh qualities—oh! we're idiots. Kids—like you, Nick, *know*."

He went in to lunch, wondering rather, and found to his relief a crowd of people had ridden or driven over.

All the afternoon they played a game of poker; in the evening there was to be another dance, at the Colefax's this time.

"I'll drive you over," Doro," Rex said to her; "we'll have the coupé, and if we break down, God help us!"

His father was looking at him; he gave a quick grunt of approval now.

"We'll follow and pick up the fragments," he said, attempting jollity.

Doro came down to Rex in the white chiffon dress, covered by a chinchilla coat, which had a lining of sheer-gold softest satin. She seemed to bloom out of it like a tiger lily, all whiteness, goldenness, blackness of lashes and long eyebrows.

"Indeed, *yes*," Rex answered gravely.

On the way there Doro leant against him happily. She longed to tell Rex the secret, he always understood; but she did not dream of breaking her word.

Only it would have been so exciting just to say, "Rex—I love Pan—and he loves me!"

Rex would perhaps make some caustic, nice sort of remark.

Suddenly now he spoke:

"Happy, Doro?"

She gave a little laugh.

"Why do you ask? Yes, of course."

"'Fess up!"

Then he guessed. But he must not.

"Did I sound guilty?" she asked.

"No, on the contrary, only very happy."

"I can't tell you, old boy," Doro said quickly, her hand on his for a moment; "directly I can I will."

He nodded.

"All right."

The car swung in between high gates, and then sped up the straight avenue to the house, which

gleamed out of the darkness like a giant Christmas tree, with its myriad lights and central turreted tower cut in a dark point against the sky.

A moment later Rex and Doro were the centre of a group of people, all laughing, all excited, all young and at one with life.

Doro's mood met theirs. She flamed into the midst of them triumphantly, to be acclaimed instantly by young Richard and borne away to "try" the floor.

The band had just come, and Richard asked them to play. He and Doro danced alone on a perfect floor to perfect time.

Doro looked over Richard's shoulder to see Pan in the doorway, and as their glances met, that sweet delight raced through her veins which she felt always now under his touch, his look.

A hideous bitterness went like some noxious, suffocating wave over Pan's soul. In that instant he loved Doro and hated Rexford with the same savage intensity.

He had not loved her before, she had been such easy winning; but now that she was out of his reach forever, the unattainable became, as it does with a certain type of nature, a nature which has been systematically indulged, for ever to be desired.

At home, years before, as a little boy, it had been ordained that Pasquale must never be "crossed," his will thwarted; later in life his looks, his undeniable charm had assisted at the continuance of

this régime, whilst Pasquale's own nature, inclined to headlong wilfulness, had allowed that wilfulness to degenerate into headlong self-indulgence.

To be baulked by a man like Rexford, a thick fool whose only weapon was the chance of his birth, which gave him power. . . .

Pan stared at Doro and Richard, dancing together so lightly that they seemed to float over the shining floor. The vision of her thus, secure in the arms of this stocky, self-satisfied youth, intensified his sick resentment; to his tortured imagination it was as if Richard's arms were a conventional barricade cutting Doro off from his pursuit.

A resurgence of that venomous desire for revenge which had overwhelmed him after his interview with Rexford was upon him. He stood staring with half-dropped lids at Doro, intensely aware of her, intent on making her equally aware of him.

He saw the rose-colour hesitate in her face as she met his dark glance, and as the music stopped she came towards him.

"Shall we dance, too, before the others come?" she asked quickly.

For answer, he made a signal to the band and put his arm round her.

For a moment they stood so, and Pan could feel, under his hard enclosing arm, Doro's heart beating frantically.

He knew his power, and at that instant he both hated and desired her—hated her for his own power-

lessness to use his power, and desired her for her loveliness, the promise her innocence and youth gave of a wildly sweet surrender.

It is possible for a man of certain intensely selfish qualities to feel the enemy of the woman he loves; that feeling held Pan now. He longed to exert the power he dared not, in order to win back for himself his sense of sovereignty and to humiliate Rexford.

Passionately he longed to "get at" Tony—to wound him beyond bearing for having hurt his pride, lowered him in his own esteem.

Wounded vanity is the strongest incentive to baseness that exists; few women forgive that slight, even fewer men, and Pan had never laid claim to any form of God-head. He was of the earth, earthy, only, he would have declaimed laughingly, of an exotic earth.

But any form of thralldom very quickly strips the polished shell of conventional cultivation from a man.

Pan, holding Doro in an almost fierce grip, whispering words to her which were like perfume upon a flame, had lost his grip on the smooth realities of life. Passion had swung him far out from his normal, indifferent enjoyment; his hurt pride had swung him further from that suave acceptance of life of which he made languid boast.

It was as if he had been swept by a tempest and the old landmarks were gone; thoughts he would

have giped at as melodramatic, cheaply sentimental, thronged his mind now.

He bent his head until his lips rested on Doro's shining hair. She could feel his breath like a caress, and she shivered a little in his arms. That look which children have sometimes of utter trust and unquestioning obedience was in the eyes she lifted to his, but in hers it was mingled with clearest adoration—the white worship of a dawn-time sacrifice. . . .

Pan realized his moment, the gift this glance meant.

He struck with his caress of passionate words at the frail barrier of Doro's inexperience.

“Every pulse in my body cries out for you—that's how I love you,” he said very low.

It was the first love speech he had ever made to her, and under the spell of its demand, its surrender, its intoxicating meaning, Doro quivered; she paled to intense whiteness beneath his glance. Between her parted lips the words, “I love you,” seemed to flow without conscious volition, as if, indeed, they were the utterance of her soul and beyond the control of bodily expression.

The music was ending. Pan looked into the eyes lifted in sweet worship to his own. Once such utter compliance with his will would have irritated him; he was not of those for whom the best, in the sense of the finest, has allure. He preferred virtue spiced,

never *au naturel*; but for the moment in his desire for victory he welcomed this entire submission.

"Doro," he whispered, and watched her eyes dilate until their greenness seemed almost golden round the black pupils. "Doro, in case we do not dance. . . . Yes, Rexford saw us this morning . . . he was—is—intensely angry . . . will you meet me at one, in the avenue? I will wait for you in the shadow, and we can have a moment together?"

He released her as the music stopped, and instantly Richard claimed her.

It was nearly eleven; there were two hours to be spent.

He went into the bridge-room and joined Tony, Pembroke and John Colefax, taking a malicious pleasure in spoiling Rexford's interest in the game by his presence.

They played high, and Pan lost persistently. Of course, Colefax, who was a bluff, decent sort with his useful ideas, the management of his place, and a knowledge of wine, made the inevitable remark:

"She spoils you, eh, Greville?" said he with a wag of his head.

"I'm devilish lucky," Pan agreed suavely, watching Rexford's flushed, hard face.

"Good as all that," Colefax pursued, grinning.

From the ballroom the echo of the music came; it was twelve o'clock.

"Another rubber?" Rexford suggested. All agreed. Half-past twelve.

"I have the next five dances booked," Pan said. He paid his losses and walked away.

He felt utterly disinclined to go into the ball-room, and went quickly through a side passage to a small door and let himself out. The clear, cold air was like a draught of champagne, the stars points of white flame, the shadows, cut by the moonlight, so dark as to seem ebon-black.

A sense of cruel power filled Pan—an overmastering desire to exert that power to its fullest.

The weather had changed, the apple-green sunset with its sliver of orange fire had foretold frost, and already the ground rang iron-hard, the wind cut sharply.

Pan felt no cold. One of those wildly unreasonable, half-fantastic moods of irrational love in which a lover as willingly wounds as adores, had been bred in him slowly but surely by the events of the last days.

He waited without anxiety, his mind swept first by one unreasoning mood, then by another. There was about him that hardness which can make so much misery for a woman, a perverse hardness, which harboured the wish to let a wrong rankle, which would enjoy the prolongation of another's unhappiness because it would minister to the need of his pride, and which, so utterly grotesque was it, could include a sense of almost savage grudge against the very being whom he loved, simply because, through her, he himself had been laid open,

by the discovery of his love for her, to this maddening defeat by Rexford.

The feeling, senseless as it was, resembled that experienced sometimes by a person who has sustained an accident and who for evermore bears a grudge against the place where it happened.

It is wholly silly and paltry, as is all resentment, the reason for which has been our own chosen action. . . .

One o'clock struck out clearly, almost triumphantly, and at that instant Pan saw Doro emerge from the house, a shadowy figure, hesitant for an instant, then approaching him directly.

To-morrow might be Paris, absence, hell for all he cared. This one hour of the night was his to do with as he chose.

Doro was beside him, in his arms, their lips met, and for Doro it seemed as if all of life, until the moment Pan had loved her, had only existed to ensure the miracle of this kiss, which flamed through her, paled in its passion, flamed again, and swept her into deathless space in which only Pan's soul and hers had place, which swept her through whirling circles of delight, so intense, it seemed, that life was leaving her, that feeling so one *could* not live—come back to earth again. . . .

In reality, she drooped in Pan's arms, lay fainting against his heart, her eyes closed, her lips pale for all their kissed passion, her heart failing her.

Pan laughed softly above the white blossom of her face, his arms tightened round her.

“Aphrodite, come back to me. . . . I want you—darling—speak to me—look at me——”

He bent his head and began to whisper between her lips, words of flame which should relight the eager ardour of her love, stir again that delicately wild rapture which shook her in his embrace like a leaf torn by a spring tempest.

Doro lay still, her lashes the only clear colour on her face.

Pan leant his warm cheek to hers.

“This is our hour before the dawn, our one hour to remember always.”

Doro stirred. Those words pierced the enfolding veils of weary ecstasy; they seemed to her overstrung mind to hold a menace. Her eyes opened, darkly questioning.

“You do not mean to leave me . . . to go away?”

Her words forced Pan against some explanation; he recognized this moment to be propitious to himself.

He said swiftly:

“I have told you Rexford has been very——” He gave a short, angry laugh; even in this hour he could not stifle his resentment. “Rexford has been damnably officious.”

“But—but he can’t separate us?” Doro asked. “Why, Pan—why should Tony be hard, he isn’t

usually. Shall I tell him? Let me; I know I could make him understand."

The irony of his position afforded Pan a moment's cheap amusement, but it brought with it the realization that some sufficiently good reason must be offered Doro. He offered the sentimental one which never fails to sweep a woman's heart strings when she loves a man.

"Rexford thinks I am too old for you."

He was sure of the answering cry, but such reckless, eager denial touched him a little.

"You *old*? You——" Doro gave a little derisive laugh, a real laugh; she could afford to be amused at such poor criticism of her god. As though age could touch that faultless face, the thick, thick hair which looked so crisp in the sunlight and felt so soft to touch.

"Seventeen—and forty," Pan murmured, his lips on hers.

But even for kisses Doro could not listen to a hint of heresy.

She said softly:

"Eighteen nearly, darlingest! And let's halve the difference of our ages and both be twenty-nine; that's a good age, and one at which all pretty women stop, G says!"

Pan laughed a little strainedly. He had no wish for this mood of gaiety; it did not fit into the scheme of things just then.

He chilled Doro's little happiness by saying abruptly:

"Rexford is adamant on the subject of my love for you. So that our happiness, its future, lies in your hands."

He lifted one soft drooping arm, and kissed it from finger-tip to elbow, his lips lingering in that white warmness.

"Ah, darling," Doro whispered, kindling to his caress. She wound her white arm about that dark head with a sudden gesture of sweet protection, and drew it close against her heart. Pan could feel the violent, young pulsation against his cheek; it roused in him a quickening of his own heart, a swifter fire beat in him than he had ever felt.

He locked his arms about Doro, and heard her give a little startled cry, and stifled it on her lips with his own pressed hard upon them.

All his scheming, his plan to outwit Rexford, to tread him underfoot, fled from him in this moment; he was, for the time being, a lover in every fibre; discreet emotion, which could be weighed, which was to have fashioned a weapon wherewith to attain his pride's satisfaction, had been swept away. He only knew Doro was in his arms, all her soft grace crushed against him. The perfume of her hair, her skin was like a sweetly maddening drug to his senses; in her lips there seemed to be a magic potion, which he drank and drank and which filled him with delirious passion.

Words of love burnt him as he thought them; he said brokenly between his ravening kisses:

“Mine—mine, Doro—Aphrodite—I am at your feet — worshipping you — worshipping you — this once—this once—before I go. I am at the gates of Paradise—Aphrodite, can you not hear my imploration? Ah, if you loved me—if you loved me as I love you, you could deny me nothing. . . .”

At that reproach which love can never hear unshaken, Doro gave a little wounded cry; she could speak no words. The thrall of utter passion, first, whitest, most utterly consuming, was on her, and she had a vision of Pan's face, his eyes like dark flames; his vivid face seemed to her to bear some mystic imprint. The wildness of his kisses had loosened her hair; one strand, warm and fragrant like a flower the sun has caressed, slid between his lips and hers.

He bound it about his throat, a living bond holding one to the other; and that action alone, the fact he could do such a thing, he, who sneered at every least deviation from the accepted code, even in his affairs of love, signaled the utter sway of the moment upon him.

They stood in the enshrouding darkness, as lovers have stood for all time, immortalized by this instant of sheer worship, touched by youth eternal. . . .

To Doro this moment seemed unreal; the place, she was, and was not, this trembling being clasped to her lover by a strand of soft bright hair. Pan

was no earthly lover, but love itself, the one mystic, divine power which gave happiness, and ah! such passionate delight, a feeling so intense it exhausted whilst it exalted. . . .

Little broken words, incoherent, helpless, fell between them. "Kiss me. Ah, you do—you do—don't you—my beautiful—my love——" And again and again that reiteration which lover seeks from lover and never hears enough, "my own."

A clock chimed, a bird stirred and called sleepily.

"Doro," Pan pleaded, whispering, "I am going to drive you home—now. We shall be alone—you and I—you and I. Wait here."

He ran from her arms across the white-lit patch into the shadow again; she heard his light steps grow fainter, cease.

It seemed so strange to be alone here, a roof of slenderest sable tracery overhead, through which, like jewels, the stars shone. She felt cut off from the world, as if she had escaped beyond it.

From the house the sound of the music floated on the still, cold air; it seemed to mingle with the sweet confusion of her brain, to sway to the rhythm of those passionately dear words, "My own—my beautiful," and the little tender homeliness, "My darling."

A car slid into sight, stopped. Pan drew her in, wrapped her in furs, had her close to him by one arm, and drove recklessly forward with his free hand.

All of her thrilled to this new contact. Her shoulder was against Pan's, his arm drew her ever nearer; they rushed through the night, and it seemed, too, to open its arms to them and call, "Come—come."

Pan stopped the car for a moment, and bent above her.

"I must——"

And he drank the kisses from her young mouth as a traveller drinks in the desert after long wandering.

"Ah! to have you wholly in my arms—*this way*." He touched the thick fur robe.

Ah, to lie in his arms, so close. . . .

CHAPTER XII

"No coward may accept ease bravely."—TACITUS.

ON the terrace Rex lit a cigarette, then listened.

Someone had started up a car. He listened more intently.

His car surely? And equally surely, running swiftly now?

He had a very boyish love indeed, a most exclusive and unassailable love and knowledge of his car.

He had really come out to look for Doro—and Pan; but now he limped away towards the stable-yard where the cars had all been parked. Their own man, who had driven in Rexford, Pembroke and Pan, was looking beyond the gate.

"Did you start up the car?" Rex asked.

"No, sir, Mr. Greville's took it, sir, and then he picked up Miss Doro."

"Where's he gone?" Rex said quietly. "Which road?"

"Rexworth, sir; going 'ome, I think, sir."

"I see," Rex nodded. "All right."

He walked away at an even pace until he was out of sight, then he began to run; he ran almost well,

he had practised for years; now he started at a fair pace.

His thoughts kept time to his speed.

“Through the beech wood, then the cut across the stream, then the long meadow—down it, it was long too—then the home hill, down it—and then——”

He was quite aware why he was going, but his supposition happened to be incorrect; he believed (Pembroke had been fairly explicit in his description of his father's attitude towards Pan and its reason) that Pan and Doro meant to leave Hurst-point together that night; he had heard of his father's ultimatum to Pan.

Neither Pembroke nor his father nor any of the hunting men who frequented the house had ever troubled to restrain the expression of their outlook on certain aspects of life, nor restricted their opinion concerning various people whom they happened to discuss.

Rex, at sixteen, had a man's judgment on certain matters, coupled with a cool, unfeigned indifference to the point at issue: simply, the moral or immoral aspect of certain episodes did not interest him.

He had listened to Pan's conversation sometimes when he had chanced to be in the smoking-room, too, after dinner, or playing billiards with his father.

He was quite interested in one affair, however, and moreover he had warm and decided views on it; Pan should not hurt Doro, if he could prevent it.

Quite boyishly now he thought, as he panted over the crackling heather :

“ Why, the chap’s *old!* ”

He was amazingly hot; it was heavy going in pumps, which gave his bad foot no support, but he did not think of resting.

“ Like a modern film,” he grinned to himself. “ G will be enormously amused when I tell her! ”

He had reached the park; he cut across it obliquely, the going was easier here.

His car stood before the door.

“ Damn cheek,” he murmured, registering another cause of dislike of Greville.

He went in by a side door, the house seemed deserted; then he remembered all the servants had gone to a dance in the village.

He looked in the music-room; a fire glowed there dully; no one there; he drew a blank, too, in the morning-room.

Hesitant, he stood at the foot of the stairs; Doro and he shared a sitting-room opening out of the gallery which was on the first landing, and then higher up were their own rooms, to which lately they had chosen to add each one other room.

He limped upstairs and whistled the old whistle Doro and he had always used.

He waited—utter silence; below in the big hall a coal fell with a little soft crash.

Silence again.

Then Doro’s voice, Doro at the door of their sit-

ting-room, a fur robe trailing about her.

"Hullo, Rex!"

"Hullo, Doro!" he laughed. "How long have you been in?"

"A—oh! very few minutes."

"Were you tired? I'd have driven you home. I see"—his voice unconsciously held a note of resentment—"I see the Lancia's home. Pan drive her?"

"Yes."

Doro still stood in the doorway. Rex, looking at her more closely, moving forward, noticed how white she looked.

"You look pretty cheap," he said with very young candour; "we'll have something to drink. I'll get it for you. You look as if you ought to. We've got nearly all that cognac father sent up to the sitting-room for a rag months ago. Better have some of that."

He was at the door; Doro stepped back. Pan, lifting his dark head from a chair where he was resting before the fire, said with a yawn:

"I'll have some too, Rex."

Rex made no answer; he limped across to their *cache*, as Doro and he had christened the cupboard ages before, and stooped to unlock it with a key he carried.

Pan, his nerves literally quivering with suppressed rage, with a loathing of this boy who had followed them, chose to feel Rex's attitude an impertinence.

"Did you hear what I said?" he shot at Rex.

Rex straightened up.

"Easily," he assured him with an ironic suaveness.

In Pan's temple a pulse drummed and drummed; he had attained nothing—absolutely nothing. His chance was gone—torn from him by this damned sneaking little spy whom of course Rexford had instructed.

He got out of the big chair very slowly and crossed towards Rex. The sight of him—cool, his air of self-possession, his very youth—struck a fury to life in himself; as lightning can cleave a rock and destroy it, so now his mad rage, the outcome of the day's humiliation, passion, defeat, cleft his reason. A mist passed before his eyes, his face was a little distorted.

"Your manners don't appeal to me," he managed to articulate.

Rex did not look at him. He said perfunctorily:

"Sorry!" And then with more courtesy, "A drink?"

Pan mastered himself with an effort which drained him of strength for the moment.

He nodded.

Doro had gone to take off her cloak. Rex set the syphon on the table, and poured out some brandy. Pan came nearer; Rex's hand on the syphon lever slipped, a stream of soda water drenched Pan's coat sleeve.

Rex gave a little spluttering laugh, exactly the laugh a boy does give under such circumstances—inoffensive, genuinely amused. He checked it very quickly, and gave a swift glance at Pan's face, proffering his handkerchief.

“Dash thing swerved!” he murmured, his hand still outstretched.

Even then he had no faintest idea Pan meant to strike him. He saw his lifted arm; it conveyed no menace to him. Then Pan's clenched hand descended on his wrist with a hammer-blow.

“God damn you, you mis-shapen, sniggering little spy!” Pan sobbed at him.

Rex paled slowly as he listened; the handkerchief fell from his fingers as he doubled them slowly into his palms.

“And God damn you!” he said in a whisper, his lips lifted above his teeth which gleamed whitely as his eyes gleamed, fixed in a stare of hatred upon Pan's livid face.

Doro's step sounded near.

Rex swallowed visibly; with a hard choking sound, he said, running the words a little together:

“I can't—after all, you're my guest till to-morrow, when you've got to go, thank God! Listen, Greville, I hate you! Do you hear? And one day I'll make you pay for this.”

Doro came into the room; in silence Rex gave her a glass.

The noise of the others returning was audible. He limped down to meet them.

"Greville, Doro and I are in the sitting-room," he said a little stiffly; "there's a topping fire there."

His father said:

"You three came back early?"

"Yes. Greville drove my car."

A look of relief crossed Tony's face; he had had a hideous presentiment at the Colefaxes' that Pan would dupe him.

"We'll come up," he said.

"I think I'll turn in," Rex volunteered. "Say good night to the others, Greville and Doro."

He never again called Greville other than by his name; he went to his room and bathed his wrist; it was badly swollen, a little discoloured.

A slow but vivid colour crept into his face and stayed there, a brilliant spot on either cheek.

CHAPTER XIII

*"This is the last one rose that's left;
This rose I send, although my empty garden
Lies bereft, where bare boughs bend.
As I have given my rest, my best,
My fairest and my costliest,
All that I had, or was, or could, or knew,
For you."*

"BUT why has Pan gone?" Doro asked.
"He was wired for, a Paris wire, business," Tony said curtly.
"But—but he never said good-bye!"
"Why on earth should he?" Tony exploded.
"Good Lord, his departures and arrivals are not matters of state, are they?"
"No, of course not," Doro said, that little piteous note in her voice.
"Go and change and ride round with me," Tony suggested. "I'll wait for you."

Doro went obediently; as well ride round as sit alone—or do anything else—now Pan had gone.

She let Emilia help her into her riding kit in silence; the news of Pan's departure seemed to have stunned her; there seemed now nothing left to do or say. It was a steel-blue day, the ground battened down, ridged with hard bars where the frost could

grip it flat, the sky like an iron plate, a forbidding day, no cheer or hope in it.

The horses were restive; Doro's mare needed handling.

"Where's Rex?" Tony shot at her.

"Indoors; he's hurt his wrist, somehow."

"Always got something," Tony muttered.

Doro, usually so eager a champion, said nothing; they rode in utter silence.

From time to time Tony glanced at her; a dull ache was in his heart, and, as well, most conflicting emotions, a very lively hatred of Pan. But girls got over things, of course; Doro would. It was early days to expect her to have forgotten entirely, come to think of it!

And as they rode the horses' hoofs beat out to Doro: "Pan has gone—Pan has gone."

Only yesterday they had walked together in the sunshine, and everything had seemed so wonderful, and as if it would never end—*could* not.

And with that thought a little warmth of comfort grew in her heart.

Pan would write—Pan would come back. . . .

There was no doubt in her heart. Only something very imperative could have called him from her now. Ah! how could she harbour one smallest thought of doubt—remembering? And with those memories her face paled and flushed like scarlet and white roses in the dawn. And oh, and oh! his coming back, how wonderful it would be!

She could not bear not to ask one question :

“ Do you think it will be very long before Pan comes back? ”

She saw Tony's dark face twitch; he looked at her very straightly, and said hardly :

“ All I can tell you is he's gone.”

“ I—I had grasped that,” Doro ventured with a pathetic attempt at gay satire.

For the *n*th time Tony was fighting over the question: “ Should he tell Doro the whole truth or not? ”

Pembroke had advised “ decidedly not.”

“ Do no good,” he had said sapiently; “ only make the child feel he's ill-treated, having no pay. Girls find it more romantic for a lover to be penniless. God knows why! Anyway, they don't think so after marriage! But provide a girl with a few good obstacles to surmount, and begad, Tony, she's off to get over 'em before you can say Jack Robinson! No, no, my lad; you lie low and say nuffin'; ‘least said soonest mended ’; and silence is never so golden as when it's a real asset. Don't go giving Doro any details to hang pity or hero worship on. Let her stay as she is, and stand clear yourself. Once let her think she's ill used or he is, and there'll be the devil to pay. I know women!”

Tony had found this sound advice in the smoking room at three o'clock in the early morning; but somehow, under the hard glare of noon which

showed Doro's face to be pitiful and tired, he was not so certain he approved it.

But, after all, what could he say to Doro? If he said anything, he must seem to know everything.

Whereas, if he did not speak, he spared Doro's forced confidence. He decided to keep silence.

They stopped for lunch at G's.

"Delightful of you," she said, welcoming them warmly, "and where's Rex?"

Once more the story of a hurt wrist.

G made no comment. She never offered comment on any illness Rex had; but she would far rather have had each one herself.

They lunched at a little round table, on which G's first hyacinths bloomed.

"Heavenly perfume," G said; "only, only as a flower—as a scent—N.B.G., as Rex says! Doro, my dear, à propos of perfume, remember this, there are three things a woman, to have charm, must cultivate, but use very delicately; they all begin with the same letter, and are perfume, passion, and perception! A right and judicious adaptability of one's life and emotions in these three instances, and a woman should go far!"

"Some go a good way without the last quality," Tony said.

"Too far, the wrong sort," G retorted crisply.

Doro was conscious of a great fatigue; G's conversation, Tony's, seemed aimless. She was thankful when they could ride home.

At home at least she could sit in her room and remember.

The days of memory began, the nights when one thinks back and back, and re-creates the shining hours, and in imagination kisses and is kissed again.

The first few days were a torment waiting for the letter which should have come—and did not.

Casually, then, Tony mentioned Pan had gone to India.

Of course, letters took a long while from there.

Doro, who had never studied geography much, pored over maps now.

A month passed, two; no letter came.

Of course, it *would* come; she would find it on her tray one morning. . . .

Frantically she "willed" Pan to write. Her faith did not falter yet; she thrust each doubt away from her with passion. Spring came, and with it a recrudescence of all the old longing which was so headlong, which held her so helpless a victim.

"Oh, Pan, Pan, to be close in your arms again, to be kissed once more. . . ."

The soft sweet nights with their drooping winds and thousand fragrances of tender growing things became a torture.

Doro grew thin. The gorgeous greenness of her eyes was shadowed by the rings round them, as if wet violets had been pressed there and left their faint imprint.

Still she believed—she had to believe; she was

too young not to. There *was* no end to love, there could not be if it was love; and if those kisses, those words, had not sprung from love, then all the world was false.

She slept very badly, scarcely at all on some nights; a desolate longing took the place of kindly, effacing sleep.

She used to lie in the window seat, her face to the stars, and think back. Each night held one hope: to-morrow was near, it might bring a letter.

The almond-blossom in the avenue Francesca had planted behind the rose garden burst into soft lovely flame quite suddenly.

Rex came to tell Doro of it, his eyes shining with delight.

"It's heavenly!" he said. "Come on, Doro; you'll adore it."

It was a morning of brilliant vividness, when every leaf shone emerald and the sky was sheerly blue with densest white clouds, which sped across it as if playing.

Against the blueness and the whiteness the almond-blossom shone in a glory of keen rose, startlingly beautiful, so lovely, one's breath was caught.

"Stand here," Rex said, "just here."

He guided her until she stood in the centre of the grassy space between the trees.

"Now look straight down the avenue."

It was like looking into the heart of a rose.

And at the sight of that sweet loveliness Doro's grief came back upon her intolerably. The laughing beauty of the day was like a blow upon an open wound; it was all so happy, she herself so utterly forlorn.

She turned to Rex and looked at him.

He met her glance with a strange gravity; he did not ask boyishly, or even with that curiosity which so many people feel, or would have felt, "What is it?"

He did not speak at all for a little while, and then he said: "It's a little blinding, all this riot of colour." He slid a hand into her arm, walking back. At the house they separated.

In the night a sleet storm fell. Doro listened to it. When it was over she crept out. Her windows had had to be shut; the air felt close.

She found herself suddenly, so it seemed to her, in a part of the gardens she did not recognize. She looked with weary bewilderment at the line of stripped, shivering trees before her.

But surely behind her was the rose garden? These trees had been the almond-blossom glory! She looked up; a few ghostly petals clung to bare branches. One fluttered down, like a pale tear falling.



BOOK II



CHAPTER XIV

"Il vaut mieux se taire que de dire hors de temps des choses trop tendres."—STENDHAL.

"CHANGE 'ud be a good thing," Tony said.
"What d'you think, G?"

"I thought so nearly three years ago," G returned vigorously, "and was told that Doro refused to entertain the idea. Naturally she would do so, it being for her good, and she young enough to know worse, as, again, I pointed out at the time."

"Well, it's got to be now," Tony announced gloomily. "Place's like a morgue—Pembroke gone, Rex away, the child and I alone. When she's not huntin' she's practisin', and when she's doin' neither she's silent."

He himself sat in silence for a moment, then he burst out:

"Damn Pasquale."

"Yes, but less loudly; a quiet damn is equally efficacious!"

Tony slewed round his face and stared at her intently:

"G, d'you think she cares still?"

G gave a little sigh. Her restless fingers, slender and straight still, loaded with rings, went on tapping the top of her ebony stick.

"Youth is so unjudgable," she said at length. "You ask me if Doro still cares for Pan? My dear, I think yes, but not, of course, as she did; that, at her age, would be impossible. Not even eighteen to twenty can live at fever heat, but, just because of those eighteen to twenty years, she does still. But he is not Pan now; he is an altar, I suspect, where no flowers bloom, a memory with a flame behind it, shining through and obscuring the real vision from the devotee. Youth never remembers, but it also never forgets! There is a difference, you know. Youth manages so ably to discard any memory it does not care for, whilst clinging with devilish obstinacy to the main fact; youth concentrates so mistakenly, and believes in 'never' and 'ever' as if they were truth, and not a sentimental paradox! So give her change, my dear; let her rip! She's lovely, lovable, and alive; she'll do it all right. We have been fools to trust to the help of time. Time seldom does much for any real lovers, save make 'em pleased with themselves for being faithful! Get Doro out of the rut; let her meet a few men whose names are neither Colefax nor Okehampton, nor any other name of the good and worthy round about, and we shall see things move—Doro move, at any rate, I hope. Music and hunting are all very well when you're married, as a respite, but as life objects—no!"

"Hermione'll have her," Tony stated morosely,

alluding to his own sister in much the voice in which one discusses a calamity.

"Then that's that," G commented.

In the silence that followed Doro's voice could be heard from the music-room; she was singing a song by Hahn.

Tony groaned a little.

"Always that modern no-words-on-a-tune sort of stuff," he said irascibly. "Why on earth Doro can't sing a decent ballad, a song you can follow, God knows."

"Ah! but it's beautiful," G said softly. "Listen!"

Tony listened, wearing that expression common to the uninitiated who have bought a good thing for vast sums, grudge the outlay, but enjoy hearing it praised, receiving thereby a faint sense of return for their expenditure.

Doro sang on, and if she had sung music-hall doggerel her voice would have made it beautiful.

When she stopped singing it was as if a sense of loss were instinct.

She came down the wide stairs a little later.

"Hallo, you two!" she said.

Even her speaking voice had changed; it had become much softer, and had certain charming, very personal intonations; odd words she said somehow quite differently from anyone else.

She stood gazing out of the window at the spring

morning, and into G's mind there came the thought :
" Ah me ! how lovely loveliness is ! "

Doro had it unquestionably and quite unmistakably ; she had it in her colouring, which was deep rose, in the glowing light of her hair, which was no distinct tint, but yet gave an impression of quick warmth from its thick depths, and dominating all else, she had loveliness in her eyes—jasmine eyes, as Rex had called them not inaptly once, when, looking at them, he had seen the reflection of white light in either, like a star, or jasmine flower amongst its leaves.

Green eyes are often talked about, and extremely seldom seen, or they are called green and discovered to be hazel ; but Doro's eyes were green in the clear light as waterpools, and in the shadow as jasmine foliage.

But she no longer laughed with them, though she laughed often.

G had noticed that and deplored it, and Doro's too evident slightness as well.

" We must get her away," she had told herself ;
"suppressed temperament is the deuce an' all at twenty-one ! "

She said now, still surveying Doro urbanely :

" My dear, you are going to do a season with Hermione Lascelles."

Doro turned round.

" Do I want to do a season with Hermione Lascelles ? " she enquired.

"Enormously—as you have to, anyway," G suggested. "You start to-morrow."

"I am disposed of then," Doro murmured, her eyes on Tony.

"Your aunt thinks it best," he said hastily.

A little to both their surprise, Doro said languidly:

"Oh, very well, perhaps it will be fun!" and sauntered to the door.

G said at length:

"The spring, my dear Tony, its usual influence, either abandon or sweet depression! Berkeley Square will be a good tonic for that, take my word for it."

"I hope so," Tony said disconsolately; he had expected some slight passage at arms which should have given him an opportunity to exert his authority, or, at least, suggest that he had the power to do so, and behold! quiescence had robbed him of the chance of exploiting what he knew he had not and had therefore longed to pretend he had.

Some of life's hardest moments are those when we realize that other people have long (and carelessly) known the weakness we believed only we ourselves suspected!

He walked out when G had left, and cursed Pan in the gardens.

There was, deep in his heart, a strange, but not bitter jealousy of Pan. Pan had taken Doro from him as surely as if he had carried her bodily away,

for Doro had never been the Doro of Tony's life after that one brief winter. She and he had discussed nothing; sometimes, hearing from Pan, whose extravagances had been tediously recurrent through the years, that he was at Bucharest, or Biarritz, or Berlin, or any other place where gaiety and women were, he had mentioned this fact openly, but no one had ever offered any comment.

Pan had had a great victory had he known it by making Doro love him; he had left Tony's life empty.

Doro had never "come back." Tony thought of it like that, not in three years even.

It was as if, over the happy gaiety and frankness, a film of frost rested; you never felt quite at ease.

Tony sighed as he walked. Perhaps London would do the trick? Make her forget.

Lord, what was there to remember so faithfully about Pan who had loved a dozen women since Doro, and only left her because of money!

Yet it had never occurred to Tony to tell Doro the truth; Pan was his brother; they had had the same father.

No, one couldn't do that.

They left for town on the following day, accompanied by Emilia, Nick and the car. Doro was to have every possible thing which made life attractive.

Of course, Tony and G had taken her to town every year "to do" the shows; they had all stayed at the Stafford, and had not bothered to open up

Greville House; but those visits had been brief and, as it were, undressed. This stay was to dedicate the French frocks and every possible adornment Doro could desire.

Hermione—"Ione," as she ordered herself to be called—was not, of course, at home when they arrived.

"Damn bad manners," both G and Tony thought. Doro did not mind.

She had met Ione several times, and she neither liked nor disliked her.

Tea was served, Doro and G presiding, to a host of people they knew by name only, though G knew their families' families in some cases. Tony knew no one, and handed food.

At six, Ione arrived. She had the odd gift which some people find a charm in itself, of appearing at once bored and vital.

Her health was amazing, though she adopted an air of becoming fatigue, and, clad usually in filmy, beautiful frocks, gave a clever impression of frailty. Her manners were adorable, if often rather exhausted, and her appearance all she desired it to be.

Charles Lascelles adored her, and had been trained by her to do so in perpetuity. He was not clever, but she had made him interesting, and she paraded her affection for him whenever she remembered to do so.

Her vivacity was inextinguishable, and she main-

tained a champagne standard, and was duly valued as a guest and enjoyed as a hostess.

Now, as she entered, some glow seemed to enter the room too.

She said at once, "Darlings!" in her attractive voice, and kissed everyone, laughed at everyone, declared she was dying for tea, had none, and lit a cigarette, made plans for the evening, and summed up Doro in her own mind.

"Spoilt, generous, self-willed, passionate — a handful—or will be. What fun! Thank God she's beautiful."

They dined at eight-thirty, and had ten guests to dinner, and left for a play about ten; it ended at a quarter to eleven, when everyone went on to someone's house, and drank champagne, and danced.

At two, Tony took Doro back to Berkeley Square, left her there, and repaired to the Stafford, and wished he had been with G, who had returned after dinner, and thanked his Maker he was going back to Hurstpoint on the morrow.

Doro woke about nine, and listened to Emilia's description of her evening, described her own, and duly went, as requested, after her bath, to Ione's room.

Ione was up in a peignoir, her hair still hanging down and tied back with a ribbon. She was forty-three and looked thirty *en déshabille*; she did not dye her hair, which was very pretty and naturally wavy, but had it washed by her French hairdresser

in some herbal wash, which answered just the same purpose as a dye, but was not such a bother.

Quite honestly, she had no real interest in anyone save herself, and, through herself, her husband and son; but she had a sense of family feeling, and her house was so large it meant very little to her chaperoning Doro, and of course Tony was a very liberal donor.

Charles, who was really nothing, was ostensibly a shipping magnate in London, and, quite truly, a good landlord in the country. Nicholas, the boy, was with Rex at Magdalen, and was innocuous, gay, good-looking, and had charming manners.

The only disappointment of Ione's life had been that he had not inherited her brains. However, he had her looks and his father's, and that was something, and also he thought her the most wonderful woman in the world, and that was another.

Not that Ione would have owned men folk who did not; she insisted on nothing visibly, and obtained everything by dint of concealing her force of character whilst she exercised it. Women loved her because she talked with them, and not about them; she knew few people who were not fond of her, and attributed this, firstly to her charm, secondly to her house, thirdly to her lack of snobbishness, which was a real fact.

There are only two sets of people in the world who are not snobs; one is the set which does not care to visit the homes of the great, or call them by

their Christian names in public, because it can, and the other is composed of those irresponsible idealists who do not count anyway!

One grasped by inference to which set Ione belonged! Her hospitality was indiscriminate; she did not care what guests she asked to her house for big affairs, because she rarely realized they were there; as a result, the semi-demi smart woman of the world, the woman of a certain social status and breeding (who possessed, however, a wider outlook than was customary in some matters!)—women, that is to say, who managed to keep their lovers and their prestige at the same time—went there; mothers as devoted to their children as Ione; artistic people, and steady friends of Charles, and Ione's habituées, and an olla podrida of moneyed London.

Ione was restlessly modern, and meant, as she said, to have a good time.

G would have been nearly stunned into a decline had she realized Ione's code of life. Mercifully, she believed it to be that of all Rexfords, and had therefore felt quite at ease in committing Doro to her charge; Tony knew nothing anyway, and would have realized very little if he had stayed a month at Berkeley Square.

Ione surveyed Doro much as she looked over a horse at Tattersall's.

Then she announced where Doro should go for clothes, where they were going during the day for

amusement, and told her she was beautiful, and asked her if she wished to marry.

Doro said "No," composedly.

"Oh, why?" Ione asked. "It's really the best way of living. Most people make such a muddle of it because they feel convinced it must have a basis of mutual adoration. As if that ever lasted—or could. Every woman ought to study science a little, sufficiently anyway to grasp the why and wherefore of duration of what all of us, at one time or another, call love! Look at me," she flashed a smile in Doro's direction. "I married Charles twenty-two years ago, and there is not one moment of my married life I regret, and yet I was never in love with him! I had a sense of values, that was all. I liked his looks, I knew him well! I realized he had certain qualities that made for peace and contentment, and he adored me. I was very fond of him, I have never liked any man as well, and so I married him. I fore-saw we could make a decent thing of life. We had the same tastes—at least, I knew we should have: Charles was malleable, you see; and we loved children and having a good time; and he, as I say, loved me. *Voilà!*"

"D'you believe in romance, Ione?" Doro asked. "I mean the sort one reads about: deathless passion, two people who matter to one another intensely . . .?"

Ione shot a very shrewd glance in Doro's direction. Tony and G had told her nothing; she felt a

little aggrieved, realizing there was something to tell.

She said, walking about the beautiful room, putting carnations straight in their vases, tidying her letters, directing her maid at intervals:

“You mean the Paolo-Francesca, Romeo and Juliet love? Yes, for a woman, but for extremely rare women; women who would use their mentality in love, never a grand amoureuse, and unfortunately most clever woman who have great temperament exploit it in that way. To love you have to have so much free time, my dear! Freedom of thought, too, and that’s so difficult to obtain; and qualities which are rather far-fetched for most of us: the spirit of sacrifice, limitless generosity, humility—oh! I don’t know: all the dull virtues which are only *not* dull when they are guided by brilliant mentality! For the ordinary every day man and woman romance is an impossibility. Sorry to be depressing, but that is the truth. It’s better, my dear, to go in for a good time! As we are going to do. Get dressed now, will you? The car will be round at eleven.”

She was peacefully bored with Doro by the afternoon, and might have stayed in that condition of perfect amiability if Doro had not arranged with Cavini for a singing lesson the following day. Ione stood on the stairs spellbound; true to type, or perhaps one should say to the standard she imposed in order to keep her position as *déesse* with her

friends, she "knew" the arts intelligently; at any rate, she recognized the wonder of Doro's voice, and quite quickly, after realization, the attraction this discovery would be for her next parties.

She went into the drawing-room when the song was finished, and found the great Cavini nearly weeping with joy.

"What a voice!" he said to her, mopping his face.

"What a voice!"

He enthused wildly, speaking with Neapolitan frankness of Doro's appearance, her anatomy, and temperament.

"Scientifically and physiologically," Ione smiled at Doro. "How interesting!"

She gave a big party the following week, and Doro sang at it, in a Callot frock, with the "temperament" *en évidence* in her voice. She had a furore of a success and, through it, became in a moment a definite personality.

Rex, down on a visit with Nicholas Lascelles, found a new being.

He told her so, leaning his long length against a window and gazing at her dispassionately.

"What d'you mean to do about it?" he asked.

Doro laughed.

"Oh, live, have a good time, as Ione is always saying."

He nodded.

"Grow like Ione?"

"One might do worse, my dear."

"Granted, as they say in Yorkshire, or County Somerset, or Beckenham, but do you enormously admire even the very best paste? I know it's a most finished thing, far more valued by connoisseurs than solitaires, for instance; but, after all, it's not the real thing."

Doro laughed again, Rex was so delightfully funny and abstruse.

"Poor Ione, how crushing!"

"Oh, she'd laugh," Rex assured her; "she'd never accept any statement that wasn't flattering as true!"

Doro liked having Rex and Nicholas; both were good-looking, and both smart with that clean niceness which is so pleasing; both, needless to say, interested in their clothes to a degree of absorption.

Nicholas proposed, quite happily, to do nothing.

Rex intended to "stand," he announced, "somewhere, somehow, some day."

His limp had nearly disappeared; he had trained, exercised, undergone an operation in order to become fit, and he had outgrown much of his earlier delicacy.

Nicholas and he, Doro and Ione, raced through life; it was lived to pitched laughter, quick wit, quicker dancing, rather heavy drinking.

Everyone drank and was amused by it, and if you drank too much, were more amused.

Rex, writing to G, was discreet for her sake; he took a week-end of his brief vacation to go down and

stay with her, though he longed to remain in London.

He told her of Doro's success; he dilated on her beauty, Ione's kindness, and bowdlerized his description of the crowd with which Doro and she ran.

He went up for a last, huge party before term began the following day. It was early May, and the train sped through cuttings tipped with shining greenness out into fields golden-starred with dandelions.

London seemed utterly delightful in the gay pink and gold sunset, the streets were thronged, the shops glowing lengths of colour; Ione's house had new flowers in the window-boxes, marguerites and lobelias, and the awning was ready for the ball, and the red carpet.

He had that splendid sense of *bien être*, which being fit and young and happy alone conveys; he took the austere steps two at a time, and hailed Nicholas with a shout as he saw him going upstairs.

They turned into Nicholas's special room for a cocktail.

"Where's Doro?" Rex asked almost at once.

"Putting the war paint on, or out, or something," Nicholas answered. "I say, Shropshire *did!*"

Rex felt an odd contraction in his heart; he heard himself say unemotionally:

"And Doro?"

"Did *not*," young Nicholas said as solemnly.

Rex burst out laughing.

"It's a chance of a life-time gone phut," Nicholas observed almost reproachfully, staring at him. "A title, places, hell of a lot of money, and a decent feller, take it all in all."

"Good deal of one sort of all," Rex suggested keenly.

Nicholas had the nature which, in early youth, admires a "dog," and believes fastness to be an asset; he wagged his boyish head.

"Oh, well, we only live once," he remarked.

"And other people live lots of lives for us to atone for it!"

"Oh, well," Nicholas repeated vaguely; he could never cope with Rex when he became what he called "top-lofty."

"What did your mater say?" Rex asked suddenly.

"Oh, nothing! Laughed. Shropshire went to her first in the good old-fashioned way. He meant business, I tell you."

"Where *is* Doro, anyway?"

"I've told you: out, or in, or not, or something," Nicholas suggested; "*I dunno.*"

Rex went in search of her, but in vain.

They met at dinner finally which happened to be a party at the Ritz, and Rex found himself opposite Doro; beside her Lord Shropshire was sitting, visibly passing through that process vulgarly

known as "bearing up," and not doing so with distinction.

Doro met Rex's eyes and smiled at him.

Again that odd little contraction shook his heart; at least, his breath caught for a second.

He went on looking at Doro, and chose perversely to imagine her engaged to Shropshire.

Suddenly Shropshire's hearty voice said to him:

"I say, Greville, whom do you want to murder?"

Rex knew he flushed darkly; he felt the hot blood drum up under his skin right to his forehead; he laughed as naturally as he could.

"I bet there was someone," Shropshire pursued heavily; "your eyes had a glare in 'em, old son, I tell you."

Rex asked himself: "What on the earth's the matter with me?"

He felt ashamed of his "idiocy" as he termed it, and turned resolutely to his partner and made conversation. He scarcely looked at Doro again.

But when they were leaving the Ritz she came up to him.

"Let's walk back together," she whispered; "it's only a few steps, and it's such a heavenly night."

She slid a hand through his arm.

And in that touch he knew, for it seemed to race like flame through his veins until it reached his heart.

The flame rested there.

Almost with stupefaction he told himself:
"I love her."

It seemed to him that he walked beside her in some dream, that he must awake and say: "How extraordinary, it seemed so real!" It was as if a spell held him in thrall; he realized the scent of the London streets in summer time; he heard the roar of the traffic; a car gleamed out of the soft darkness; Doro was speaking.

And mechanically, over and over again, his own soul seemed to say: "I love her; I love her."

Now, as she moved, as her hand pressed less lightly, that amazing thrill pierced its way to him again. He had never—as an actual fact, as a thing that could, that must happen to him—thought of love. His life had had no place for it, no time; even lately, at Oxford, he had never been absorbed by the one topic which seemed to interest most of the men. There had been Doro and G in his life; they had sufficed him. He did not realize and would not, for some long time, how much G's influence had swayed him; how very much she had counted, and how wholly finely in his life.

To-night—all the world seemed a new place; miraculous, yet disturbing, greatly perplexing.

"You are very silent," Doro said to him, "and we're nearly there. I wanted to hear about home."

Rex dashed into a jerky, spirited description of his visit, and all the while, as he held her arm in closely, he longed to cry out:

“Don't take your hand away, I love it there!” and wondered with a sort of chill, almost frightened wonder, what Doro would say if he did so.

He was uncertain what he felt, save this heady, stinging sensation of mystifying delight; he was out of his depth utterly.

He glanced at Doro's profile shyly, bending his head to see it better.

It was as though he had never seen her until now. He thought of his stay at Pointers, and his restless longing to be back in London.

He had wondered why a little himself; it had been all the while as if some power had been drawing and drawing him back.

He remembered walking in G's garden very late, and standing beside the tobacco plants and feeling the strangest sense of stirredness.

But he had not actually thought of Doro then; it had only been when he had imagined her in love with Shropshire that he had truly realized; he had known then that for her to love another man would be hideous—simply, that it could not be.

At that moment it did not seem to him that love *could* be unreturned.

Because it had been born in his heart, it must be born, too, in the heart of the woman who had inspired it.

Life's most delicate and poignant irony, the belief that love must create love, was accepted by him as a lovely and immutable gospel.

Partly, perhaps, because he had been ill so much, and, therefore, had been debarred from leading the ordinary boy's happily dull career, the strain of mysticism in his nature had become a strong influence. He brought to love much that few youths of his years could bring, and one quality which few people ever practise or can, with regard to love: the exercise of philosophy.

He had read so much, dreamed so much, been—save for G's love, his love for her (in itself a strangely gentle, strangely curious influence)—so alone, that his outlook was bound to be either misanthropic, or that of a visionary disciple of whatever creed aroused his loyalty, his unspoiltness and straightness, and, until a short time before, pathetic disability for sport had made it the latter.

He was clean all through by instinct, and because of G's robust clarity.

If he was pedantic, he was also gallant.

That wild desire to tell Doro, to urge what seemed to blaze in his brain and heart, to speak of his love, seized him again.

"Doro," he said, and thought his voice normal.

Doro, loosing his arm, said:

"Did you speak, Rex?"

The crushing snub, which mere normality administers more effectively than irony or indifference, because it is unconscious, struck him to silence.

She was on the red-carpeted steps, he mounting behind her; the moment had passed.

Ione was already at the entrance of the ballroom, looking a little bored and quite beautiful, and wearing what Nicholas disrespectfully described as the "eternal fender"; some people had arrived and the band was playing.

Rex, with quick foresight, claimed certain dances with Doro; later, much later, she was to sing. Re-amez was to appear also, and Cavini was to play.

"Now we're off!" Nicholas exclaimed, listening to this description of fame and beauty.

Ione danced with him; she loved him as she loved nothing and no one else; for her, he was never this big person, but her little son, whose advent had been the greatest joy of her life. He danced perfectly, and so did she, and she looked like his sister.

"Muv, you're a beauty and a peach," he told her.

"And you're a darling, Baby," she answered, laughing at him, her brilliant eyes soft and shining with pleasure.

Rex, dancing with Doro, felt his dream-thrall upon him, and with it that startlingly keen perception dreams seem to confer; it was as if he really "saw" Doro for the first time, and he gloried in this flooding vision.

His thoughts ran goldenly; every poem he had ever read of love of lovely women seemed to float through his brain.

He invested Doro with the glamour of a first great romance, and could look this night upon her rose-carnation colouring, her lovely-petalled mouth, with

the worship of one before an altar. He and she seemed both unreal in this white hour of revelation.

Yet once, as they danced, and Doro moved her head and her hair brushed his bent cheek, a thrill so exultant, so virile, shook him that unconsciously his arm tightened round her, his hand holding hers trembled.

Oh! did she not feel too—she must, she *should*.

He relinquished her with his heart drumming like a rebel against all serenity, and his young blood like wine.

He could not dance with anyone else yet; he slipped out on to the balcony.

London glowed and shivered with intensity of life around him, he felt a passionate oneness with it, with all the glitter and stress; the golden lights below, the silver above, and between—the swimming blueness of a perfect night.

Down in the street a man laughed, a girl's voice answered his laugh; the lilac trees waved their fragrant tassels and wafted the scent into the soft air; a laburnum gleamed like palely golden fire.

All Rex's youth flamed in him, too, like a mounting torch which would blaze into sudden dazzling splendour.

"I live, I live," he told himself, with a little, excited, boyish laugh.

Suddenly he longed to be in G's garden beside the tobacco plant again, its intoxicating and poignant perfume charming him like a caress.

To stand there with Doro and kiss her, and kiss her . . .

He realized that the dance music had ceased and went back; everyone was moving slowly towards the music-room.

Doro was to sing, or Recamez; at any rate, he longed to hear.

He saw Doro standing beside Ione, and Cavini waving his hands absurdly and smiling fatuously.

Everyone grew very still; Cavini ceased attitudinizing and seated himself at the piano, and the first notes of *L'Heure Esquise* fell like flower petals into the silence.

That sheer ecstasy, which can only come from knowledge as well as appreciation, filled Rex; each tone of Doro's voice was like the music of his own spirit.

The song ended, and there was that moment's supreme tribute of utter noiselessness before the applause broke out.

Rex, as it died away, when it was seen that Cavini was preparing to play again, heard a voice behind him, and recognized, with that irritating uncertainty which nags at the mind, that he could not place its owner, and unwillingly turned his head.

His eyes met Pasquale Greville's dark golden ones.

"Ah, Rex!"

The two nodded coldly; Rex turned away again. But he had lost his hold on utter delight, and

though his music-loving soul paid its just tribute, yet his mind was absorbed by Greville's arrival.

And instantly, as partner to his disturbed absorption, came another thought: What would Doro feel?

He looked at her, and by a most unhappy chance saw in her eyes her greeting to Pan.

His soul sickened with an unknown fear and dread as he watched Doro's face: for it was exactly as though a light were lit behind those lovely eyes; as if one gazed, oneself on earth, upon the entry of another into Paradise.

Her face was illumined, transfigured for a second; then convention reasserted its sway, and she smiled formally at Pan.

And he? With a violent twist of his shoulders Rex stared at him again.

Ah, he had seen, too!

He had been of even colour when first they had recognized one another; now, after that instant's exchange of glances with Doro, his face was white.

Rex studied him with the merciless scrutiny of youth for disliked age.

He looked older, his thick hair had a powdering on the temples, innumerable tiny lines showed round his mouth, but he was still damnably good-looking, and Rex hated him for the fact, as well as for forcing it on his recognition.

But he looked "lived out," and Rex recognized it. He pushed a courteous way to Pan.

"When did you get back?" he asked civilly.

"This afternoon, from Paris, from Petersburg, from Peking!"

"Rather interesting tour. I suppose you made it because of the alliteration? Staying in town long?"

"Haven't an idea."

"Where're you putting up?"

"I'm at the Ritz. You must dine one night."

"Thanks. I go up to-morrow, though. I'm with Nicholas Lascelles at Magdalen."

"Ah! Dim shades of my youth!"

"Oh, really?"

They had no more to say—they eyed one another with hidden hostility.

Pan said perfunctorily:

"And Hurstpoint, and so on?"

"Quite all right, I think. I was there for two week-ends. My father and G were fit."

The use of that possessive pronoun irritated Pan; obscurely: supercilious, affected, young cub!

He said in a slight drawl:

"Doro seems to have come on, what?" and without waiting for Rex's answer, strolled through an opening he saw and walked towards the piano.

Rex watched the actual meeting with miserable weakness, aware he only did so because of his suspicion, and despising himself, and yet unable to leave the coign of vantage.

And again he saw Doro's face illumined for a

moment; then, bewilderingly, it changed utterly and became ironically cold.

He turned away and went into the other room, an anguish of a half-understood bitterness welling up in him.

CHAPTER XV

"Debts make freemen slaves."—SOPHOCLES.

WHEN Doro faced Pan utter nervousness possessed her; she wanted to laugh aimlessly; she had no clear thought, no instinct of what to say.

She gave her hand to Pan, and, as if that touch released some spring which had restrained her mind, there rushed upon her the memory of their last parting, that winter's night years before, and then she said with banal flatness:

"You are back then?"

Pan answered:

"The Prodigal has returned! Will you help kill the fatted calf at a dinner to-morrow at the Ritz? I am staying there. And you?"

"Ione is giving me a season."

"Ah, really!" His eyes sparkled for a moment. "That is splendid. I am to be in town, too."

Ione joined them with a little cry of pleasure. "You!" she said, holding Pan's arm, "after long years indeed! Well, comment ca va?"

"Isn't everything very much the same?" Pan answered.

"Ah, you've been as dull as that? Poor dear!"

"You look radiant," he told her.

"I feel it. Why not?"

Doro was studying Pan as he talked to Ione, and the study stirred her heart unutterably. She so loved beauty, and here before her again was that face which had once been as a god's; at which, just to look, had seemed such wonderful happiness.

And she had not only looked!

Her heart throbbed unbearably as she recalled those wild kisses, clinging, unsatisfied, so passionate; as she remembered other dear, absurd, little delights of love-making, Pan's eye-lashes kissing her cheek, herself tracing his profile with a finger he caught and prisoned between his lips. . . .

Now they met like this—and yet all that had been! That question women's hearts have asked through the ages echoed in Doro's:

"How can he? How can he?"

How could he stand so near, and never care if it were less near, or more; he who had once said: "I could hold you in my arms for ever?"

Yet he could; and suddenly his indifferent composure became a mortification.

She gave a little smothered gasp. She would go; she would not wait.

David Shropshire passed; his face lit up at the sight of her.

"My dance?" he said impressively, and led her away.

Ione laughed at Pan.

"You saw?"

"Not entirely clearly, I'm ashamed to confess, my dear, knowing your passion for pace in all things."

"Not all. But in this affair, yes. David wants to marry Doro, and I want him to, too. She's the sort of girl who won't take the plunge easily. There is too much romance about her, my dear, to allow of any dalliance! If she waits to marry—she will wait, become *choyée* probably, and not marry at all. And that is a tragedy for any woman with looks."

"Why?" asked Pan idly, disliking the conversation, yet forced to go on with it if he wished to learn more of Doro.

"Oh, children," Ione threw out lightly. "Doro should have adorable babies, position, and so on. After all, Tony can do something for her, but not very much. Rex gets everything, naturally. He's the dearest being—a cross between Sir Galahad, a budding La Rochefoucauld, and a portrait of one's ancestors!"

Pan asked, with startling abruptness:

"Rexford, how is he?"

"Oh, Rexford, that's all!"

He wished Ione would not be so elliptically witty, or less convinced wit must be brief.

"Did he talk over my sins with you?"

He had to know that, to discover where he stood in this new and intriguing scheme of things which presented itself to him, and Doro as Ione's ward.

Ione laughed really amusedly.

“My dear, I only see Tony once in fifteen blue moons, and then only for an hour; in eternity he may begin the discussion you mention: we might thrash the matter out then!”

She did not know then.

“How d’you like having Doro with you?” he said, pretending to look in idle interest about him.

“Oh, greatly; she has all the gifts a guest should have: looks, an exploitable talent, the right clothes (I chose ’em), and, thank God, the art of retirement. Shall we dance?”

CHAPTER XVI.

*" Love, till dawn sunder night from day with fire,
Dividing my delight and my desire,
The crescent life, and love the plenilune;
Love me though dusk begin and dark retire.
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon. . . .*

*" Nay, I will sleep then only, nay but go.
Ah sweet, too sweet to me, my sweet I know.
Love, sleep, and death go to the same sweet tune,
Hold my hair fast and kiss me through it so.
Ah, God, ah God, that day should be so soon."*

SWINBURNE.

I WILL not remember, I will not," Doro told herself vehemently. "Oh, why did he come back?"

She dreaded a resurgence of the old unhappiness, as one dreads the recurrence of a devastating pain, and yet there was upon her that ghastly sureness which freezes hope, that she was not safe, that she was to be claimed again, that the pain already had thrust out a tiny spear which was beginning to rankle.

She went everywhere with redoubled vivacity; she never rested, she was afraid to rest.

Rex had left with scarcely a word, and she had scarcely missed him; all her consciousness was ab-

sorbed in escaping from her own memories, in defying their power.

The glimpse of a branch of belated almond-blossom, its tiny, exquisitely vivid roses shining out like coloured stars, struck her heart like a blow. For one second she was back in the gardens, the big, soft night-wind blowing, the rain beating gently on her face, and the almond-blossom falling, falling like weary tears.

"Heavenly stuff!" Ione said. "But so foolish! The frailest, most adorable of all flowers, and it braves the earliest spring! So rash of it! No wonder it withers first and never finds the lovely summer time. Lack of perception there, if you like!"

Doro laughed mechanically.

Ah! lack of perception, indeed—and how true that the frailest blossoms withered first——

She clenched her hands suddenly; she was "thinking back" again, and that way lay the land of desolation. . . .

Pan came very little; for one thing, though this may not have influenced him greatly, his allowance was just due; for another, he was finishing an affair which threatened to be rather troublesome.

For a last reason, he was uncertain of himself for once.

He had no idea what Rexford had told Doro, and he had no means of discovering her actual knowledge.

So he avoided her rather, giving time its chance: time which obligingly laid bare so much, time assisted by a subtle searcher!

But, as history can prove with crushing force, one glance can suffice to wreck the matured plans of a lifetime.

Pan, rather pleased with himself for his abstinence, assuring himself he was fleeing temptation, keeping his word, considering Doro's good, not a little inflated by the sense of his honour towards Rexford, refused Ione's invitations systematically, to meet Doro at a small party which Shropshire gave at Ranelagh.

It was a hot night, and the air was weighed down by a thousand perfumes; perfect summer bred restlessness by its beauty.

Shropshire, in his blindness, had placed Pan on Doro's left. Was he not a sort of relative, and therefore safe?

The great Recamez, great in every sense—*"et pourquoi pas,"* to quote an adorer, "since one could never have too much of the truly beautiful?"—offered generously to sing.

Shropshire gave an order to the musicians, and the leader hurried forward and bowed before Recamez.

He was Italian. *"Of course,* he knew Madame's songs—Good God, yes! And might he—dared he suggest he alone should accompany the great diva?" . . .

After further compliments and a smile from Recamez's scarlet lips which dazzled its recipient, the little man took up his violin.

"I will sing an English song," Recamez announced, "and I do not know its title! At least, I forget. Let us call it 'Love.' It is a word we all understand, and it has a wide appeal, I think!"

She opened her beautiful mouth and began to sing, and she sang like a child which is hurt and a woman who loves too well.

The words fell, each distinct, apart, sheerly beautiful:

*"To sigh for thee, cry for thee,
Under my breath.
To find but a shade
Where thy head has been laid,
It is death.
To yearn for thee, burn for thee,
Sorrow and strife;
But to have thee,
Hold thee and fold thee,
It is life, it is life!"*

Doro had sat immobile at first, then memories like a bursting flood had poured over her, and then, with almost terrified realization, she had felt Pan's hand touch her; for an instant she felt utterly numb, then she shivered desperately, and helplessly she let her hand slip into those ardent, seeking fingers, which closed on her hand, and seemed by

that action to close, too, on her heart, drawing it wholly from her into his own keeping. She could not look at him. She knew Becamez sang again, stopped; people talked, she herself spoke with David; but all the while she was intensely, widely conscious of that clasp, that touch which had the power to change her whole being, to sweep her soul, her senses, as a musician's bow sweeps the strings of the instrument he loves.

Oh, again, again, to feel those kisses which opened Heaven, again to be crushed in an exultant embrace, again to listen to words smothered in the saying by dearer words unspoken.

Again, again to live, to wake and thrill and sleep, and dream, to love, to have love once more as the beat of the day's measure. And into her surcharged mind some lines flashed dizzily—lines of a poem, some woman loving over much had prayed:

*“ This will I ask of Christ the Lord,
This much for thee and me:
Only to be as once awhile,
Forever now
Together,
I and Thee. . . . ”*

It was wrong—she remembered only vaguely—but it expressed the unspoken, overwhelming longing in her heart.

Everyone rose. Pan drew her chiffon cloak, with its soft fur collar round her shoulders. He said in a normal, self-contained voice:

“Shall we go in the gardens? The lily pond is rather attractive.”

They went out together. To Doro the world was empty save for their two selves.

Pan took her arm in his cool, close grasp, and led her past rose trees palely flowering now in the powdery moonlight, for all their riotous loveliness by day, towards a dense belt of shadow flung by some trees.

They had kissed before under trees, and now again they claimed their shelter.

“Doro!” he said in a stifled whisper. He gripped her hard by both shoulders.

“This is madness,” he muttered. The passion-broken words fell about Doro like a drift of golden leaves; she lifted her face, almost sacrificially, and he kissed her.

“Ah, you love me—you love me—say it,” she whispered against his lips. In that imploration was so much suffering, so many fears, all the years of waiting: “Say it—say it!”

He kissed the words away, kissed the power of speech from her, kissed her until she lay utterly spent in his arms.

Then, with a passion-shaken laugh, that low, broken laugh of a sure, exultant conquest, he said:

“I love you, I adore you.”

Doro caught his dark head, back-flung for the moment, between her two hands; she drew it down until she could gaze into those shining eyes.

"*Look at me,*" she whispered. "You must. I must be told the truth. Why did you leave me? How could you? Why did you never write? Oh, Pan, I waited and waited, and I—you don't know what it meant to be without you—and every day I used to think, perhaps a letter will come—perhaps. I watched every post. And you knew, you knew, you held all my life between your hands—and yet you went—you left me——"

In that moment Pan would have lied to her had his life been forfeit for it, for upon him had dawned the certainty, dearer to a man of his type than any, that for Doro he had found again the power to love. In Doro he found personality and loveliness, and also one other thing, which, for some men, has a great attraction, and has its value for all: she had a certain place already in that world which decrees and refutes. Rexford's name, the romance of her adoption, and her voice would have given her social prestige; but her own imperial youth was her greatest charm. Many pass through youth and have not this talent for largesse of their very selves, are powerless to give out anything to the world.

Doro gave unconsciously, with both outflung hands, her radiant gaiety, her shining loveliness; she stimulated like a draught of sparkling nectar; she was vivid in every movement, every thought,

from the crown of her head, with its so vital hair, to the soles of her narrow feet upon which she went so lightly.

Pan found it extremely pleasant to love where all loved, and yet know oneself alone beloved!

Selfish, vain, fantastically weak, his love for Doro began to possess him wholly, and, as was inevitable with a man of his age, this possession became a goad; he was never free from the thought of Doro, nor wholly happy in that thought away from her.

To his type of temperament remorse is alien; it savours of bourgeois melodrama, and what is even worse, discomfort!

If Greville thought of himself in actuality, he did not think long. His tedious marriage had not hampered him for years: why should it now?

Yet, at intervals, he resented his powerlessness with a sort of puny fierceness: he cursed everyone save himself for the dilemma in which he was now placed.

He told himself, once or twice in the very little hours when he was tired, that he ought to give up seeing Doro; but it never prevented him telephoning at their usual hour to arrange their next meeting.

How it would all end he never let himself think. After all, this was the beginning, or the continuation of the beginning, and what true lover ever foresees an end?

Forty-five—twenty-two : he did not encourage this memory, and told himself with a small grimace that he had never cared for arithmetic.

And, after all, what was forty-five for a man? He thanked God with genuine gratitude that he was of the "lean kind," and that his hair was of hardy growth!

"Half the battle!" he told himself appreciatively. "Lines add interest; but a threatening of baldness—one's waistcoat in a wrinkle—adieu romance!"

He was, oddly enough, not very vain of his looks; his vanity waited on his attraction for women, but mere features, colouring, did not interest him greatly.

Of course, he was aware he was good looking, but mercifully he forgot the fact very often.

As a lover, he was all sufficing, and since much practice goes to make perfection, this fact was not amazing.

To Doro, he was Heaven, the sun and stars.

These years of despairing waiting had given her emotional maturity, and had quickened her sense of adaptability through force of acceptance of conditions. To-day Pan received the benefit of quick understanding. He must never be thwarted, Doro learnt swiftly, and avoided this catastrophe by agreeing with him or maintaining an innocuous silence. Sorrow, any suffering is popularly supposed to endow the sufferer with the gift of understanding, and most people mistakenly conclude this

understanding must be universal. In point of fact, whilst any poignant grief must open new channels of vision within one, they are traversed merely for the purpose of carrying one's own thoughts to that other person who counts, and towards the world that pretence of indifference is manifested, which, because it displays itself in courteous and easiest acceptance of most things (from lack of entire desire to penetrate into anything at all), is acclaimed as "sympathetic insight"!

Anyone who says, "Ah, yes, I know, I understand," to the inquirer is bound to be popular. Many women, without ever having had a vestige of hurtfulness of heart even, have achieved a reputation for selflessness simply by the exercise of such speech, and all the while have merely used it as a shield for their boredom!

Doro "learnt" Pan ably, and if she found the lesson difficult, she brought concentration to bear on it.

The discovery that one person can argue, or rather that it was easier for one person to do so, left her rather silent sometimes; a second discovery that small vanity is not a woman's prerogative caused further adjustment in her outlook on them.

But, above all, transfiguring everything, her sheer worship of Pan made every little consideration of no value.

Minor selfishness became "his ways," and, as such, to be laughed at and rather loved; moods

existed for her love to disperse; jealousy was, of course, a proof of love, even when it became exigent. For Pan had reached that somewhat pathetic milestone when youth itself has become a dormant grievance, unacknowledged because vanity denies its value, yet nevertheless a very real factor; in spirit he was antagonistic to it, and though he spoke of it with amused admiration, he could not make his voice of that inflection which conveyed genuine pleasure.

He delighted in the possession of Doro's youth, but he drew her from direct influence of other youth by subtle use of such words as "flamboyant," "noisy," "banal."

Doro began to regard any quick call of life as something to be avoided, or indulged in when Pan was far away, and even then with a little ashamed nervousness!

Yet she missed nothing; the days were only time in which to see Pan, to wait for him.

Occasionally they had some hours together; late in the season Pan offered to drive her down to Hurstpoint.

Doro was delighted, Ione agreeably interested.

"For one night only," Pan said, "you'll need very little luggage, Doro."

The day dawned airless and goldenly hot, but on the sunny road there was a little cool wind.

They lunched at a hotel where, alas, the lunch, according to Pan, was everything a lunch should

not have been; but, luckily, that cloud faded, and when they drove the car over a heather-covered common, and stopped, and sat down on the purple carpet, life became wonderful again. Pan had taken off his cap; he lay back, his hands clasped behind his head, and smiled at her.

"I should!" he said encouragingly.

They both laughed; Doro bent over and kissed him.

"Again and yet again," he quoted lazily, his golden eyes glowing; he stretched up a hand and slid it behind her neck, thrusting his fingers deep into her soft hair. "God, you're a delightful thing, Doro."

"Heavens, you're a darling, Pan," Doro mocked him gaily.

She sat up, leaning back on one hand, the other straying on Pan's shoulder; he kissed it, and Doro, looking down, was conscious of a sudden intense tenderness at the sight of that dark, bent head; she drew it close to her breast and they sat so, and she kissed Pan's hair gently. Near them a may tree stood, flinging its shadow across their resting-place; the dense blueness of the summer sky pierced the branches, a bird sang somewhere, a bee lumbered past, giving to the afternoon that sense of country sweetness and peace its murmur always wakes.

Idly, Doro glanced at the heather, already tipped here and there with the paleness of exhaustion beneath the sunshine; in the distance trees stood out

sharply against the sky; from far away a train whistled, bringing to their intimacy that odd "nearer" sense, the very faint reminder of the outer world conveys. In a patch of shade the car stood, again an emblem, in some way, of their "togetherness." In it they had driven from Banegh on that night when all the stars had seemed to light her soul.

Of all time did not this hold the hour when Pan and she could talk of the days to be?

She said peacefully and utterly naturally:

"Pan, darling, where shall we have to live? Here, or abroad somewhere?"

He did not start actually, but inwardly he felt jangled, irritated by this forcing of a decision on her part, however unconscious.

He drew away after a moment on the pretext of getting his cigarette case from his pocket.

"Where would you like to live?" he asked carefully.

"Any place is Heaven if you are near me," Doro teased him; but at his movement, at some latent tone in his voice, one of those incomprehensible, indescribable little shadows fell in her heart which only a lover knows; she sensed that Pan had "gone away" from her, and yet had no definite ground for believing it.

Rather shyly, she said:

"I—I suppose, after all, even we will have to settle down some day."

Pan gave a short laugh.

“You sound optimistic, my dear, I must say!”

His eyes were narrowed as they were wont to be in moments of annoyance, his cigarette seemed to be burning badly, he threw it away, and it lit a living path of heather to a point of amethyst flame; the flame died.

Doro said a little nervously:

“You aren’t very encouraging, darling, yourself, after all.”

In answer, he pulled her down suddenly beside him and leant his cheek to hers.

“No, I’m not. I’m a beast to you sometimes, I know. I deserve that you should hate me, but I love you, love you, love you. Do you hear?”

How could she fail to hear and be swayed by the words she loved best of any?

Pan forced her gently back on to the heather and leant upon his elbow gazing at her.

She smiled at him under white lids, her eyes, in their lashes’ soft shade, a glint of deep blue-green loveliness.

“Open them,” Pan commanded, “wide!”

Doro obeyed laughingly, shyly; she opened them widely and the strong golden light filled them: Pan had once said that when most she loved him her eyes were greenest.

“Is it all right?” she questioned with tender gaiety.

He was gazing at her sombrely; she looked so young and yet so intensely alluring with those innocently passionate eyes. . . .

He bent and kissed her, locking his arms about her with a fierce pressure, almost hurting her with long, hard kisses.

She forgot the question of the hour entirely; the world seemed a place where purple heather met a purple blue sky, where softest summer winds blew from a far sea, and where love was a joy so wild it seemed to hold pain within its depths.

They stayed in one another's arms; Pan reached for a cigarette and they smoked it between them, talking with that careless content that only lovers know, laughing at nothing, endlessly, boundlessly happy.

Cyclists passed on the far road, other cars.

"Who cares?" Pan asked with superb disdain.

"It *must* be tea-time," Doro said at last. "Darling, we must hurry; we'll never reach home for dinner."

"Who cares?" Pan repeated, his ardent eyes on her face. "Do you?"

"Not a bit," she confessed, "as long as we are together, I do not care if we never reach anywhere."

Pan's darkly golden eyes flashed suddenly.

"I wonder if women ever mean that sort of remark?" he said slowly.

Doro, unpacking the tea-basket, laughed over her shoulder.

"This woman means it," she said; "you and I—you and I—Pan . . ."

She came and knelt before him.

"I feel sometimes as if a veil had dropped between us and all the rest of the world, and we stood on one side of it, blessedly, beautifully alone."

"You think lovers have a right to be that—," he hesitated, under his tan he had paled a little; "I mean, you think they can make laws for themselves—that they—as you say, can shut themselves off from the world; have the right to live for themselves?"

"Yes—I think I meant that."

She looked at him with a little puzzled gaze; her speech had been a speech of love; it had held love's meaning for the moment, and so served its purpose: Pan's insistence on its gravity was rather confusing.

She made tea, and they picnicked delightfully.

"We must go," Doro said, "Pan darling; we must, honestly."

"Why?" he asked.

"Well, angel, it's seven, Hurstpoint is far, and if we are going to see them, it seems hardly courteous to arrive so late we cannot see them because they'll have gone to bed!"

"Suppose we don't go at all?" Pan suggested lazily; he did not look at her.

"Just go back, you mean?" Doro said dubiously.

"No, go on—somewhere else. Just you and I. Have one evening all to ourselves; one perfect evening to remember all the time we're not together. We could say—"—he made a great pretence of hunting for matches: "Ah, here they are—we could tell Ione we had a breakdown. . . . Of course, if you'd rather not—" His voice grew flat, disinterested.

"I—I—it would be heavenly sweet," Doro said with eager anxiety to meet his every wish. "Darling, I would love it, but—but—doesn't it sound—wouldn't it seem—"

"Oh, possibly it would. It was simply a rather wild idea; it seemed beautiful. . . ."

He had risen, now he stretched.

"Come on, I'll take the basket."

All the joy and "nearness" had gone; Doro felt guilty, piteously shy, and punished.

She went to him and put her arms about him.

"Oh, darling, yes, if you like—if really it won't matter, and you think Ione won't be coldly furious—"

"She need not know, Beautiful," Pan said, his voice caressing again, his eyes glowing. "Doro, you mean it? Listen then, Sweetness: We'll put up at some inn and dine together, and then I'll—I can cut off and sleep in another pub, any old place, and come in for breakfast in the morning. And if Ione asks we'll tell her—and if she doesn't, and it's a thousand to one chance she will, or take any interest at all, we'll lie low and 'say nuffin'.' And

we'll have had, what we've never had, one whole gorgeous evening together. Beautiful, you are the most generous giver in the world."

But, in the car, speeding in search of the "perfect little place" Pan had "heard of," Doro felt that nameless dislike for this project which was so seemingly fair and sweet.

"You really think it won't matter—that Ione would understand?" she questioned bravely, yet fearfully, dreading Pan's bleak look of disinterest.

But he looked at her now with tender amusement:

"Little frightened baby! All right, we'll go on, my darling, and render unto Ione a faultless recital of our blameless outing! How's that?"

"Oh, darling!" Doro said, kissing his sleeve.

"Then laugh with the jasmine eyes! Hang it all, I believe you're frightened of me!"

"I am not!" Doro cried. "Oh, Pan, *look*, the sunset."

Pan slowed the car down and they gazed together at the sky, which was like a field of flowers: lavender, lilac, mimosa, and the soft scarlet of deep peonies; high up, a star, like a primrose, shone.

"We must be moving," Pan said; "a quarter to eight. Hullo, an inn, I'll get some water, I think; the radiator seems pretty warm."

He went into the inn and, after a time, an old man brought a can of water, spilt it successfully over the nickel-work, and accepted a shilling gratefully.

"Now to pace!" Pan said; his voice held a note of excitement; he caught Doro close in one hand and laughed down into her face.

"All the dawns and sunsets which have ever been are not as beautiful as you," he said.

The car took a hill at a splendid rush, coughed, hesitated, stopped.

"Damn," Pan said; he lifted the bonnet.

"Out of petrol, all but," he said; "we will run back to the inn; she will do that."

The car went back well; the old man reappeared.

"I guessed you'd be back," he said amiably, "by the smell o' that oil when you'd gone! An' a pool in the road—but it is all done dried up now—I dunno!"

He was evidently ignorant of petrol's power of evaporation.

Of course, there *was* no petrol, and the nearest village was some miles away, and there might be none there.

Pan's dark eyes were laughing; he said to Doro:

"Fate's decided, darling!"

It seemed so useless now to argue, to complain or worry.

"Fate has decided," Doro echoed a little wistfully.

"Kind fate!" Pan smiled.

He went inside the small, spotless bar to see the host and order rooms, dinner, arrange everything.

Doro sat on a bench beneath a hedge of most aspiring hollyhocks and wondered about things.

Convention, in its strongest form, had never interested her, for the excellent reason that she was not vitally impressed by the obvious details of an everyday life; she had never worried about convention because she had always been conventional!

Of course, Pan's love and hers was different from everyone else's in the world; and, of course (her sense of honour prompted that admission!) everyone else thought exactly the same thing about their love!

Still, there was a difference—he was in the family——

And, after all, it was not a crime to have a breakdown and stay at an inn—only it was a disadvantage!

Then Pan reappeared; he came over to the bench and sat down beside her and said in that repressed voice, which had such power to move Doro's heart:

“Let us have one evening of all our love; it has been given us, Loveliest, after all—Doro—be happy.”

His cool hand slid over hers, imprisoning it on the sun-hot wooden seat.

“Doro, look at me.”

In that look Doro forgot convention, the small worry of her mind.

The white road was empty far and near: Pan kissed her full on the mouth; he “left” a little kiss

with her and drew away from her, smiling mischievously.

"You have a room all musty and clean and dreadful!" he assured her blithely. "Texts to the right of you, texts to the left of you, baby! Yellow soap, and a dimity frill to your dressing-table."

"And where do you go?" Doro asked.

"Heaven knows!" he laughed.

A little black-haired woman took Doro upstairs to the room Pan had described so exhilaratingly; he had not erred about its charms. Certainly this inn laid no claim to being a godless hostel.

But they dined in the garden, and a car passed. Doro heard it go.

"We could borrow some petrol," she said.

"Next car!" Pan promised.

But the next had passed too before they could rise from the table.

Ten o'clock chimed as they ordered coffee from an obviously disgruntled landlady.

When it came it was undrinkable.

Pan went into the bar to give a last order concerning the petrol a "hand" was charged to fetch.

"'E's callin' 'ere about five, sir," the landlord said; "young feller off of a farm as lives near Fresham. 'E'll ride on his bike an' get you 'nough to tow you along."

Pan thanked him.

"Leave the door, will you?" he suggested. "We shall come in soon, but it's so cool outside."

Doro and he walked in the old rambling garden; it had a sweetbriar hedge, and tobacco plants and stocks; beyond it an orchard lay.

"Eden!" Pan half whispered, laughing a little.

The car stood in an open shed just beside the high gate which shut off the garden from the orchard.

"Wait!" he said.

He fetched the rug from the car, and together they entered the orchard.

It smelt pungently fragrant; the moon had risen and flooded through the branches, starring the deep grass with pale pearls of light.

Pan opened the rug under a tree.

"Now, are you not glad we had to stay?"

He spoke against Doro's lips and felt her shiver at his nearness.

"Are you not?"

"Yes, oh yes."

They lay close to one another, Doro's head upon Pan's outflung arm, their faces so near a sigh seemed sighed between them.

"This is living, this is love," Doro whispered.

"This is madness," Pan laughed, kissing her eyes, her hair, her throat. "Ah, Doro—Doro!"

Across his mind wild thoughts raced, faded, seemed to blaze like fire. Had he ever meant this hour to come? Should he be afraid to take it now? Other men had no such scruples. After all, Doro loved him—all the passion was not his. Could they not live abroad? She was his last love; this, he

knew, was the passion of life. Rexford—Hurstpoint—one had but one life, and it was passing—passing.

“Oh Pan, oh Pan, this is Heaven, to feel you close, to be able to kiss you in the darkness, and not dread someone coming! Ah, yes, I’m glad we are here. I never loved you before as I love you now—to-night——”

“Is that true?” he asked her, straining back his head to look into her eyes.

“You know it. Can you not feel it?”

“*Let me feel it.*”

His hand slid like a kiss from her throat to her heart, and it seemed to Doro as if he cupped her heart in that clasp and took it wholly to himself.

He had drawn the pins from her hair; it fell over both their faces, a warm fragrant veil, as they kissed and kissed.

“You belong to me—we belong,” Pan murmured.

“Pan, never let me go, grow tired of me.”

“I shall be dust when I loose you,” he said sombrely, “but you——”

“How can you?” Doro cried, her voice breaking with that hurtness only passionate love when it is doubted can feel. “How can you? All my life lies in your hands. I don’t mind; I do not care what you do with it, as long as it mingles with your life. As I love you I shall never love again. I could not love anyone else; all I have ever felt, suffered, has been for you. It is you, you, you every hour, every

minute, and oh! you know it so well, and yet you taunt me——”

“If I doubt it is because I fear so,” Pan said hoarsely, and he bent his head suddenly so that he laid his face on her knee.

She looked down at him with a mingling of tenderness and passion, and somehow pity; then, very gently, she drew him up until his lips touched hers; that token of surrender, the evidence of such a love, was like a point of flame set to the repressed fire in Pan's heart. He took Doro's face and held it so, her chin gripped by his hand, and then his mouth pressed hers so deeply, so hardly, that she gave a little cry, but Pan's kiss stifled it into soundlessness. His lips stayed on hers; he seemed to be drawing her life blood, her heart-beats, the very essence of her being from her.

At last he released her, and they stayed so. Pan put a shaking hand over his eyes.

But still upon them both was the magic of that kiss; they seemed to kiss again without volition, as naturally as they breathed, and again the kiss grew closer; it became a demand, a surrender, a joy past bearing.

“This is love—this is love: feel my heart—reel it,” Doro said.

The words quivered on her lips.

Her voice came to Pan as if from a great distance, but it brought in its echo the memory of her

as a being apart as well as this wildly sweet young lover whose kisses rivalled his own.

He said, striving for control:

“You must not feel so—your heart——”

It leapt like a soaring flame under his hand.

“Doro,” he said helplessly.

“I believe I was born to love you, just for that, only for that! Oh! if I could die now, utterly, utterly happy. Pan, do you remember the poem, ‘In the Orchard,’ we read one day together in the library at Hurstpoint? We should have read it here. Then, I didn’t know. Now, I do. I know now what it means—‘life running over, life near to go’: to *want* the person you love, to love and love you, even if it hurts. Oh, Pan, can you believe to-morrow can ever come and we wake and find this hour has gone? Never to return, to be re-lived. One little hour—it dies and life flows over it and goes on——”

Pan put an arm about her, and they sat so, leaning against the tree, cheek to cheek.

“Yes, I remember,” he said gently. “I can see you now in the library, the firelight, the gold and white of you, and your shining eyes, so really like jasmine leaves, the little golden stars dancing in them from the fire. We thought we loved then—but now——”

She slid an arm round his neck, and ruffled his thick, short hair.

“Does one remember!” he said.

"We are in the orchard now," Doro murmured.
She began softly:

*"Leave go my hands, let me catch breath and see;
Let the dew-fall drench either side of me;
Clear apple-leaves are soft upon that moon,
Seen sidelong like a blossom on the tree;
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon——"*

A thrill shook her at the beauty of the words, and she kissed it upon Pan's lips. Close to him, her mouth touching his, she went on, quickening again to the thought of the poem:

*"The grass is thick and cool, it lets us lie.
Kissed upon either cheek and either eye,
I turn to thee as some green afternoon
Turns towards sunset and is loth to die.
Ah God, ah God, that day should be so soon."*

"It will be dawn early," Pan said; "the moon is failing now."

"I never want this night to die. I want you to love me all over again."

"Love me, though dusk begin and dark retire—
Hold my hair fast, and kiss me through it so!"
Half laughing, the shaken, low laugh of love, she drew a mesh of her hair about them both.

"Kiss me—love me; swear, for ever."

"For ever. Doro, listen. We have to-night, it is ours—give it to me wholly, make it the night un-

forgettable of both our lives. Let me kiss you till the dawn. I swear to you by all that is holy, you shall never regret it. I swear to you I will be good to you—Doro——”

She had drawn a little away. Shy fear struggled with her, adoration, and a strange sense of forlornness.

A bird stirred somewhere; Pan moved restlessly. In the moonlight she saw his face, white, with brilliant eyes.

Uncertainly, she whispered his name.

He caught her to him desperately.

“Doro—our night—it will soon be dawn——”

Together they walked through the soft lush grass; a shape loomed before them, moved. Doro gave a little cry; she heard Pan say reassuringly: “It is all right, darling.”

He went forward; there was a scamper of hoofs, a glitter of frightened eyes, and the colt bolted away, and Pan uttered some word sharply as he fell.

Doro knelt beside him.

“Darling, you aren’t hurt?”

He did not answer.

Doro called again. She put her arms round him, and lifted him up. His eyes were closed; across one temple a black mark showed, a little blood was running from it.

“Pan—Pan——” Doro whispered frantically; a fear which choked her breath seized her. She knelt

on, holding Pan in her arms, whispering his name
over and over.

And suddenly she knew.

He was dead.

CHAPTER XVII

"The lack of Justice in life is one of life's greatest mysteries. . . . We are always finding excuses or reasons for acts of Providence which, to our own inner conscience, are the reverse of Just and Right."—RICHARD KING.

"I AM sorry," Ione said with delicate clearness, "really sorry, my dear Tony. You see, I had no idea."

Rexford had come up to town to go to Tattersall's and had, naturally, called in at Berkeley Square. G and he had heard reports of Doro's success; the fame of her loveliness had spread. Tony had said nothing, but had been entirely delighted, and G had said a great deal, and that had delighted him too.

Tony, immaculate, if hot, had been hailed by Ione with real pleasure; she might scoff about him and G, she might ridicule them to their faces, she might also be an indiscriminate hostess, a most liberal critic, but in her there was an unalienable adhesion to her own breeding, the "clan" instinct had never died or even faltered.

She chose to be every sort of woman for her own amusement, but she remained *au fond* a great lady.

Tony had asked for Doro at once, and Ione had commiserated with him on having missed her, since Pan was driving her at that moment to Hurstpoint for the night.

Into Tony's face an almost blasted look of rage had come; it was as though his own rage struck him and disfigured him.

He conquered himself and said meekly:

"To Hurstpoint, begad! Damn. It's like his insolence! How long has it been going on—has he been here?"

In a lightning flash, when he had explained the truth, Ione realized the seriousness of this matter. She knew Tony's worst suspicions to be just; she knew herself to have been reprehensively careless.

"But Doro knows Pan is married," she said.

"She may; I'm not sure. When I sent him off he was over here about a divorce. We never spoke of the matter. That's not the point now, either."

"No," she answered simply, and added: "What do you mean to do?"

She made no effort to suggest comfort, nor did she utter soothing platitudes about things, "never being so bad as they seemed," and so on. She was a woman who knew her own men.

"I'll get off back at once," Tony said grimly.

He kissed her absently and marched out.

Ione walked to the window aimlessly; abominable, the whole thing. Why had not Tony trusted her in the first instance? But why should he have done? If it had been Nicholas, she would have spoken of it to no one. Every thought she had damned Pan and despised him. And inevitably perhaps she thought: "If the girl had been one of us, really

one of us, this could not have happened." Though she knew this was unfair; some obscure "family" sense made her very resentful of Tony's agony of spirit about Doro.

Cars passed and repassed in the square; a barrel organ was playing somewhere. Ione had a hundred and one things to do, appointments, visits to pay; she stayed beside the window.

She felt both distressed and affronted, and her dignity of life had been struck at; this sort of rather cheap affair should not happen. She resented it extremely, and her resentment fixed itself definitely upon Doro's secrecy.

Finally, with an expression of bored annoyance on her face, she went up to her room and rang for her maid to dress her.

But all the afternoon, despite a rather amusing rencontre with a man who had adored her for years, and despite pleasant places and people, she could not shake off a little sense of anxiety.

The butler told her when she returned, just in time to change for dinner after a dash to Hurlingham, that "Lord Rexford had rung up to ask what time Mr. Greville and Miss Doro had started?"

"I told his lordship," the man added.

Again that "little" sense stirred uneasily.

It woke to definite, sharp anxiety when, upon her return home at one o'clock in the morning, she found Tony ringing up from Hurstpoint to say Doro and Pan had never arrived.

"Tony—wait—don't ring off," Ione said miserably, uncertain what to say, suggest. "D'you think an accident has happened?" she hazarded.

Neither had anything to say in reality. Ione passed a sleepless night, and rang up Hurstpoint at seven o'clock in the morning.

Tony had no news for her.

A spasm of intense anger against Pan and Doro seized Ione. She raged inwardly, as women of her type do, most rarely permitting themselves to express anger. At eight the telephone rang again. A man's voice, a stranger's voice asked:

"Is that Mrs. Lascelles?"

"Yes. Mrs. Lascelles is speaking now."

"I am Dr. Holcott. I am speaking from my house at Moor Green, a village between Godalming and Petworth. If you can, will you come down here immediately? Your brother, Mr. Greville, has been taken seriously ill."

"Yes, I will come. Who is with him?"

There was a pause. The voice answered cautiously:

"A lady."

Ione heard the receiver click.

She told her husband to ring up Tony while she dressed. The call came through rather quickly. Tony's voice said:

"Doro is here. Pan was killed by a horse's kick last night."

"I am coming," Ione answered mechanically.

CHAPTER XVIII

"La nécessité empoisonne les maux qu'elle ne peut guérir."—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD.

NO influence could avert an inquest. The Barley Mow Inn and the little village became famous. Mrs. Lawe, the landlord's wife, was never tired of giving reporters a full account of all that had happened. Doro's face looked out at the world from every half-penny rag; the "romantic secret" of her birth and adoption was published far and wide, and many other things were published, contradicted, published again, and so on, until the interest in the affair died.

It died slowly, and Ione suffered a rage of humiliation whilst it lasted.

She went everywhere it was possible to go whilst mourning Pan's death, and she maintained an even composure before her world; she stayed in town until the accustomed date for her departure. Doro was obliged, on certain technical reasons, to be at Berkeley Square for the last week of June.

She had ceased to mind where she was; Hurstpoint had been like a prison. Tony had spoken seldom, G was ill, even the servants looked at her askance. No one quite understood what had hap-

pened that night at the inn—or, rather, everyone believed what they secretly wished to believe, and that is nearly always the worst.

Ione was as just to Doro as it was in her to be; but she, too, had suffered, and suffering had changed her brilliance to a certain light bitterness which wounded and stung.

Doro knew, as if Ione had said the words to her, that she would never forgive her for having created “a disgraceful scandal” in the family.

It was the one unforgivable sin. Doro ceased to care, finally, what she thought or what anyone thought. After any tragedy, great or small, there follows a period of exhaustion in which is enfolded banality, a tepid dreariness, simply by reason of contrast.

This exhaustion settled on Doro. She lived through the days in a sort of grey trance, a cloak of misery about her soul, a deadly weariness in her body.

Occasionally, in the night, she would wake and remember, and feel for one second the intense sorrow which, at first, had nearly cost her her reason. She would re-imagine that last long look at Pan when he had lain so white, so still in his coffin, the chiselled beauty of his face a wonderful mask in death.

Ione had insisted with disinterested composure that she should take up her music again.

“You must do something.”

Cavini, astute as only a bourgeois Italian or Frenchman who has made himself known can be, had wondered greatly about Doro; the truth concerning her birth had intrigued him greatly.

He rallied her on her slackness.

"What does it matter?" Doro asked bleakly. "What does anything matter, or will anything, a hundred years hence?"

Nothing mattered now, nor did anyone care what became of her.

She seemed to belong to no one. Tony rarely spoke; Ione was unapproachable; she had sinned past forgiveness.

Gazing at Cavini, a thought struck her for the first time.

For weeks she had been seeking an escape; suddenly, it seemed to her, a way opened.

Cavini had been searching for some music; he turned and gave a snort of contemptuous clearness.

"Who talks of a hundred years hence?" he retorted. "I speak of to-day, and the fact that you are neglecting your voice. Oh, you women with your sentimentality, it would not matter if it did not affect you vitally. But it does. Something has happened to you, and you refuse, therefore, to take care of the loveliest gift a woman can have. My God, how wasteful—and how silly, too! For if one thing fails, why not take up another? Nothing satisfies so much in this life as Art, when one suc-

ceeds in it. And you, you have the voice to carry you where you wish."

Doro gave a hard little laugh.

"Then let it—and you guide me," she said composedly, but two brilliant spots of colour flamed in her cheeks.

Cavini said testily:

"I do not understand."

"Ah! like most people, now you are asked to prove your words you draw back."

"What words—how?" Cavini ejaculated.

Doro rose and stood beside the piano.

"You said just now, if one thing failed, why not take up another, and that nothing succeeds like successful Art. And you believe in my voice. Very well, take it, me, train both of us for the opera."

Cavini's little eyes glittered for a moment, then he said unctuously:

"Ah! you jest, signorina. Your people, what of them?"

"I do not belong to them," Doro said slowly; and as she spoke, for the very first time in her life, she realized that truth. Sudden burning tears filled her eyes; through them she gazed at Cavini.

"Are you willing to do this?" she asked him defiantly.

He opened his hand with a deprecating gesture. Already his astute mind was weighing the possible loss, wealthy profits, consequent upon his exploitation of Doro, should he entertain her suggestion.

And as she stood there, the faint sunlight touching her hair, her face etherealized by its sadness, sheer artistic admiration swept aside every other consideration. At last there would be a young Mimi, slight, alluring, passionately appealing, and Louise—and Carmen—and then in Wagnerian work. . . !

He caught hold of Doro's hands.

"Yes, and yes, and yes!" he exclaimed, the moisture of artistic perception glistening in his eyes, the vision of triumphant achievement in his mind.

"Then," Doro said indifferently, "I want to leave England at once."

CHAPTER XIX

*" My heart it was a cup of gold
That at his lip did long to lie,
But he hath drunk the red wine down,
And tossed the goblet by.*

*" My heart it was a white, white rose,
That bloomed upon a broken bough;
He did but wear it for an hour,
And it is withered now."*

JOSEPHINE DODGE DASKAM.

"BUT my dear Tony, you cannot stop her,"
Ione said quietly.

She was sitting on the edge of his sofa, upon which he was lying, recovering from an attack of illness. His head was still obliged to be kept low, and now he twisted about seeking to get comfortable, making himself appear an unwieldy mound of heaps and bumps, covered by a singularly brilliant Chinese dressing-gown.

"My dear, don't take it so hard."

Tony answered nothing. After one violent speech of denunciation and reprisal he had scarcely spoken. Doro still visited him, and he still ignored her.

His attitude, "I'll bring her round," was the last by which to influence her at this time.

Both were supremely unhappy, both quite intent on having their own way. Ione, irritated to the

verge of a breakdown, was the buffer between them.

Already Doro's plans had been arranged; she was to leave for Paris during the week. Of this Tony knew nothing; he still clung obstinately to the idea that Doro could do little because he could render her penniless.

He kept this fact to himself, proposing to reveal it only as a last weapon.

Doro went into Tony's room this evening whilst Ione was there; she was in a linen walking-dress.

Ione was wrapped in a pale lemon-coloured lace teagown; both looked listless.

Tony humped himself up and glared at them.

If either had felt the possibility of amusement, this "I-must-have-my-own-way—small-boy" attitude would have been amusing; but Doro, aware she must tell him of her departure, Ione tired out by the exercise of a patience which was unnatural to her, merely felt the strain of everything, its weariness and futility.

Ione lit a cigarette and handed her case to Doro. Through the open windows the soft roar of Piccadilly sounded; the trees in the square had a heavy covering of grey dust; the air seemed exhausted by the fierce summer heat.

Ione's dark eyes questioned Doro not unsympathetically. Personally she considered Doro was doing, if not a wise thing, a thing which held less unwisdom than any other course. It was manifestly impossible for her to take up life at Hurstpoint

under the existing circumstances; it was equally impossible to propose marriage for her for the same reason. Somehow Doro must obtain means to help her forget, live down.

Ione knew life does not run to schedule, as Tony appeared to think it did, and that youth *because* it was youth is not malleable (and is, indeed, when love has touched it, the least malleable of all things): his other outlook, that all youth needed to heal its wounds was substitution, was equally fallacious in Doro's case, and he was equally pig-headed on this point. He would, when he chose to, forgive Doro—get her anything she wanted.

He was about to put this fact into words when Doro's voice, low and not quite steady, said:

“Darling, I am leaving with Cavini for Paris to-morrow.”

Tony stared at her, then he said hoarsely:

“Indeed.”

“Yes, and—and, Tony darling, won't you, won't you try to understand, and let me go feeling—feeling——” She faltered and stopped.

Tony said with sledge-hammer clearness:

“If you go you don't come back. You understand that. If you become a singer you cease to be my adopted daughter. That's all I have to say.”

Unconsciously Ione had placed herself beside him. To Doro they seemed two foes in that moment.

“Tony,” she said in a whisper.

He believed her to be weakening. He did not know that there are tears born of highest courage as well as those of weakness; he determined to push home his advantage.

“If you go, you go penniless,” he said. “An’ you and I are—through—it is finished.”

Doro turned blindly and sought the door; she got out of the room somehow and reached her own.

Tony said sharply to Ione:

“She’ll come round.”

CHAPTER XX

*"Thou giv'st thy laughter only unto one.
He hath no eyes to see.
Give, when his bitter jest with thee is done,
Thy tears to me."*

MARY COLENDRE.

NICHOLAS sauntered in to Rex after lunch. Rex was just changing to go down to the river; he was pulling on a blazer as Nicholas stated bitterly:

"Here's a pretty go!"

Rex looked at him; he had a letter in his hand.

"It's from Mother—here."

Rex read it; he was conscious that Nicholas was whistling between his teeth, strolling about and moving things, looking for a certain brand of cigarettes.

He folded the letter and said composedly:

"There, in that porcelain box. I say, Nicholas, I shall go up to town."

"Whaffor?" Nicholas asked, his mouth full of cake.

"Oh, I must," Rex answered, and began changing into town kit swiftly.

It was, however, not until after eight that he managed to reach Berkeley Square; he asked for Doro.

"I believe Miss Greville's in the gardens, sir," the butler said. "She asked for the key a little while back."

"I'll go across," Rex said.

He saw a white dress in the bloomy darkness, and walked in that direction.

He halted near and called:

"Doro!"

His heart leapt wildly as he heard the gladness in her voice.

"Rex—you?"

"I."

He went and sat on the green-painted curved seat beside her; he wanted to shake hands, but his hands were trembling; all of him had trembled at her voice; he put his entire will into the effort to obtain complete mastery of himself again. All the way up in the train he had been practising his part in this scene; he had conceived his rôle to be first that of a listener, then, little by little, they would discuss everything very quietly—and then—he would tell her the real object of his visit.

He had written to her as soon as he had heard of Pan's death—he had written again and again and received no answer; it had been impossible, by his father's orders, for him to leave Oxford. Doro had never received his letters. He was wholly uncertain of her attitude towards Pan; it was impossible for him, knowing so little, to rank her affection at its value, but he felt, when he thought of Pan, that still

black hatred which is like lightning striking the steel of a man's nature.

Pan was dead, but he had injured Doro by his death; and indirectly that injury had driven her to this.

Rex said now, leaning a little forward, his hands gripped one within the other:

"Are you going to tell me?"

"There isn't anything to tell, except that I leave for Paris to-morrow with Cavini and his wife."

"You are going away?" Rex asked almost vacantly. "So soon?"

"Yes, I imagined you had heard, and had come to say good-bye. Tony refuses to see me again."

She turned to him, and he knew there were tears in her eyes.

He put out his hand, and let it rest secretly on her dress; just to touch her so gave his anxiety rest, seemed to heal his desperate longing a little.

A tear fell on his hand.

As if it had been a key unlocking the gates of his pent-up passion, words rushed to his lips.

He heard them, recognized the violence of his pleading, abasement, almost with self-amazement.

But he would not draw back now; it was only when Doro's reiterated cry, "Rex—oh, Rex!" reached his mind through its encompassing blaze of passionate adoration that he faltered and stopped.

About them there was that stillness which a garden can hold in the midst of a hurrying world;

the fragrant peace was like a keen mockery to Rex; he moved restlessly, and as he did so Doro rose.

He, too, stood up.

"Don't go," he said hoarsely, "don't go—yet. Don't, don't leave me—like this."

"But everything is spoilt; you don't understand. Oh, why, why did you tell me this?"

He said, very low and breathless:

"Beautiful, don't you realize I couldn't help myself? I didn't mean to tell you anything. I came just to try and comfort you—and then—you cried—and I could see your face in the dusk, and about you there clings some scent and it drifted into my brain, I think—you were all sweetness and tired loveliness."

"Don't, oh don't!"

She did not mean to be cruel, but this scene with Rex was an anti-climax; it was almost incredible and yet it was true. Love, such love as this, which spent itself in words of wildest adoration, which abased itself utterly; Rex, the boy she had laughed at, known so well with easy affection. She was angry if she was definitely anything, and yet angry and sorry at once; he had thrust upon her a burden she felt, when already she was bowed down with weariness.

He began an impetuous speech.

"Please—please," she said.

He gave a little bitter laugh, the sheer banality

of that word was cruel, as banality always is, must be, to young love.

"You can't—you can't leave me like this—dismiss my love with a 'please,' as if it were an offering so paltry you could refuse it as you refuse a servant's offer of a new dish! It does not matter to you; it is my life, all my life, do you hear?"

"You think so now," Doro said bitterly, hurt in her turn by his denunciation. She made a great effort to be kind, to overcome her weary consternation and help Rex if she could.

"Rex dear, don't you see," she said gently, "I—I have finished with love. I can't talk about it, even to you."

He faced her with white stubbornness; his own love was all that mattered.

"You never knew love, you never met it," he burst out, contempt, appeal, anguish beating behind his low voice. "I don't care what you say, how you feel, you must listen. I know this is true, I know I am right—love which is real, which will last, is love like mine, 'young,' as you call it, mocking at it for its youth—that youth which gives it half its wonder. For it is young love which *loves*, and never counts the loving, or the giving, or the suffering; other love, later love doesn't do that—cannot. Later love compares and contrives, and there is no headlong divinity about it, either of passion or foolishness; it's just a sort of emotion that's often rather furtive, and afraid to let go and uncertain if it will

last itself. As I love you, I should never love again; all love that comes after a love like this will be only half real. All that is real, and true, and willing and humble and proud in me beats in my love for you. And you turn aside from it because it's young! There's one thing"—his voice held smothered bitterness—"it's a fault I'll grow out of!"

"Oh, why will you?—oh, Rex, don't be so difficult, so hard—Rex, I'm so unhappy."

Rex's breath caught in his throat; he was, at that instant, very near to tears himself.

Then he stammered in a whisper:

"Oh, my darling, my Beautiful—don't—don't—I can't bear you to be unhappy!"

He put his arms round her so gently they scarcely touched her, and yet gave her the impression they were a protection, just as he had meant they should.

Yet, in that chivalrously tender gesture he could feel Doro trembling, and every atom of adoring virility in him thrilled to that knowledge.

"But I am," Doro said like a child.

As if she had been a child he soothed her; he made her tell him all her plans.

But he had his arms about her, and as they spoke together, his clasp grew a little closer; his face was near to hers in the soft gloom, that scent of which he had spoken almost despairingly thrilled him now with its sweetness.

"There isn't anything else to do, Rex," she told

him despairingly. "I cannot go back to Hurstpoint, and Ione—of course she does not want me."

"You could marry me," Rex said with fictitious calmness, "and be free."

"I mean it," he added fixedly; "I would give you my word. I came here to-night on purpose to tell you that; it was the real reason for my coming. Doro, will you do it?"

"No, and no," she said, breaking from him. "Do you think—do you suppose one forgets like that?"

He tried to regain the old trust, but it was impossible now.

In silence they walked to the house and bade "good-bye."

Rex held Doro's hand against his heart.

"Always," he said, "like that. Do you understand? And I shall never give you up. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XXI

*"What is the use of April—what the use
Of her wild dreams, unless you bear your part?
The spring has let a thousand voices loose,
And shall not one find way into your heart?"*

GERALD GOULD.

IF Doro had longed for change of outlook, scene, surroundings, mental atmosphere, she obtained it.

She had told Cavini of Tony's refusal to countenance her action in taking up a career, and the obvious sequel Cavini had foreseen.

He had all the small Italian's commercial sense and lack of discrimination with regard to hotels.

Later on, when Doro became famous; ah! then! But for now, when no one was famous, and fees were still fond visions of a far future, why not a *pension*?

He therefore repaired with his wife and Doro to one of those high houses in a meagre street in the wrong quarter of Paris, and there Doro began to train.

To say she was disillusioned would be to describe the state of her feelings poorly—she was both crushed and infuriated by her surroundings, and secretly disgusted.

She had, even though she would have denied it to herself, expected a certain glamour. She found dust, and inefficient service, and cheap, greasy food instead, and ceaseless, ceaseless work, and endless chatter from Signora Cavini, who was none too pleased with her husband, and who went in deadly fear lest Doro should prove a failure.

Another thing: no longer was Doro the spoilt and admired pupil. She was now Cavini's instrument, upon which he meant to play his way to fame.

"My God! use your brain," he would storm. "What are looks, a voice, even teaching such as mine, if you sing a burial song like the chorus of a Vaudeville refrain? Open your mouth, open your mouth—you are not drinking soup!"

He, too, had his moments of doubt, and he took them out on Doro.

No one wrote.

Then, by chance, she met David Shropshire in the Rue de la Paix.

In a moment his hat was off, his round, good-tempered face beaming down upon her.

"I say, what luck! Come and lunch?"

They went to the Café Parisien, and Doro had the first good lunch she had eaten since she had left London, also the cleanest.

Cavini had been peculiarly domineering that day. It was cold; life seemed incredibly dreary; she looked at David with eyes which saw him most kindly.

And she thought of Rex, who was David's type, insomuch that both were lean, clean mortals, with an air of pleasant distinction and very happy manners.

In the old days she had thought David stupid. Rex had never been that, never could be. To-day, however, David's conversation had the agreeableness of novelty after the Cavinis' outpourings of complaints or mediocre gossip. He talked of the life Doro had known so well. She wondered a little shyly, and yet with real curiosity, if he would tell her again he loved her.

He did not; instead, outside, when he had hailed a taxi for her, he said gaily:

"I suppose when the great night comes I'll be admitted at the stage door, what?"

Doro made some laughing reply. Definitely, quite surely she knew that in Shropshire's eyes she was "different" now, and that he would no longer allow himself to wish to marry her.

She did not know how she knew, but she did. As it happened, she was quite right.

At Christmas Rex sent her a box of scarlet roses, which filled the *pension* with perfume, and asked if he might come to Paris.

She wired back, "No."

She spent the dullest half-year of her life, and was actually glad when Cavini announced that they would leave for his mother's home in Italy the following week. His wife and mother were lifetime

enemies, and Signora Cavini showed a definite reluctance to acquiesce in this plan, which swept the *pension* like a tornado.

There was, however, deep method in Cavini's madness. Averado, the impresario, was at his villa convalescing, and that villa happened to be above the modest dwelling of Cavini's parents on the hillside at Fiesole.

Cavini was a being subject to sudden attacks of a spiritually gambling nature when he "believed" a certain thing would happen because he had thought of it suddenly, or had thought of it slowly; any reason did which served Cavini's end.

In this instance he told himself Averado would hear Doro by chance, be enchanted, and offer to place her.

With that luck which attends few human foolishnesses, almost this very thing happened.

Only Averado saw Doro before hearing her. When he discovered the green-eyed vision to whom he had blown surreptitious kisses was the owner of the voice which roused his keenest commercial instincts, he could scarcely believe his own good fortune.

He forgot gain, caution, his health, and bore down on the modest house of the Cavinis like a fat whirlwind.

Doro was in the studio alone, and he kissed her at once, and thanked God she was alive. The Cavinis entered on this scene, and for the next ten

minutes the place was a pandemonium, in which Cavini smiled, Averado beamed, Signora Cavini and old Cavini laughed and chatted together.

Doro, at a shouted command from Cavini, sang a scale. Suddenly Averado embraced her again, and this time she gently disengaged herself. He was quite Italian in his culinary appreciation, as well as his knowledge of music, and her own taste in food had remained so far severely Anglo-French.

But the day was to be a gala, and it was celebrated accordingly; and all at once Doro found herself flattered by everyone, fêted, acclaimed.

It might have been a first night. She wished it had been.

Thereafter she practised with Averado, and he sent into Florence for the great Ortez to sing with her.

In less than a week the tiny operatic world in and about Florence had become Doro's setting, and she, too, began to call everyone "carissima"; she, too, became accustomed to quick, meaningless embraces. At last the life began to claim her, and she forgot to be unhappy within herself.

Averado discussed the future with Cavini. He had not made a big fortune by altruism, nor by any other unworldly methods, and his knowledge of humanity was as great as his knowledge of music.

"Spain, Madrid," he said, waving his manicured hand at Cavini, "the home-land—the bird returning to her nest. What a draw to a sentimental

nation! The little Freddy must advertise for us; the English have a sense of bringing anything to the notice of a would-be buyer better than any other nation. Only wait—you will see!”

Madrid did, at any rate, for that long-suffering town was placarded with posters in the national colours for weeks before Doro's appearance. She was billed as “The new Diva,” under the name of Dolores, and her connexion with the English aristocracy was not allowed to be ignored.

Of course she was to sing “Carmen,” and when she asked why “of course?” Averado laughed fatly.

“All things are vanity,” he answered reassuringly. “To be popular is better than to be eclectic; only the conceited and very wealthy can afford to be that, the former because it does not matter what such are, the latter because it does not matter either in a different way! But to please, you must possess the desire for ‘universal oneness,’ though not quite in the sense our priests mean!”

He introduced Doro to the great Rachel Dure, who extended to Doro first that gracious patronage an artist is able to give to a beginner in a different art, and later a very real affection.

La divine Rachel at forty-five was no mean instructress of life; all that had colour, vividness, fire, any expression which counted, she had drawn towards herself.

She was beautifully plain, a *belle laide* of great

dangerousness, of most passionate emotions and subdued sensuality.

Rumour granted her countless lovers; she had had but one, and he had died.

Of course the world did not believe in her faithfulness; indeed, few people *can* believe that an intensely vivid emotionality can exist without indulgence in headlong passion. Yet, paradoxically, most often the one bars out the other, for some emotionality springs, nine-tenths of it, from a keen mentality, a mentality keyed up to perceive and accept the beautiful things in life; whereas passion can be roused by almost any means, many un-beautiful.

The highest form of emotion breeds keenest criticism; passion never leaves time to judge well or badly. Rachel "gave" the stage life to Doro, who ceased to feel self-conscious at last, and began to accept the new atmosphere with gaiety.

On their way through Paris Doro stayed at Rachel's *appartement*; it was bizarre, lovely, extravagant and neat—all qualities possessed by Rachel's personality.

There, modern Paris met and adored itself and one another.

There, Rex came to see Doro.

Rachel claimed him at once; she liked his fair, debonair good looks, his mind; he was the one person Doro found who treated neither of them as if they were on the stage.

She remembered David Shropshire had not done that.

Tony, it seemed, never spoke of her; G often.

"Ah, because you do!" Doro said, with rather sad clearness of vision.

She studied Rex as one does when suddenly an old friend is much admired by a new one!

He made no least effort to talk of love to her now. She half wondered, had he ever done so? It all seemed so far off now, and ineffectual somehow.

On the last evening of Doro's stay (she was to leave the next day for Madrid) he took her to dine at Henry's; they were to go on to fetch Rachel at her theatre later.

"Shall we drive into the country?" Rex suggested. "You won't be too cold?"

Already climatic conditions had become a matter of great importance.

He only drove out beyond Armenonville in the direction of Versailles.

Beside the wood he stopped the chauffeur.

"Let's smoke a cigarette here," he said to Doro.

They strolled down a little winding path; far away, it seemed at a great distance, the trees joined so often, the stars were shining. Rex lit a cigarette for Doro; then when she had smoked it for a moment took it from her gently.

Instinctively Doro knew.

"Do not spoil our happy time," she said shakenly. To her surprise he gave a little low laugh.

"Spoil it? Look at me, Doro."

It was a challenge.

She looked at him standing straight before her, his face a pale blur in the dimness, but his eyes ardent, visibly shining.

He took her hands lightly.

"So you do not love me—yet?"

Doro met him in the same spirit.

"Not yet."

"There is someone else?"

"No."

"Thank God! Then I still hope," he said always in that odd, gaily controlled voice, which gave the strangest effect of coldness and fervour mingled.

"We ought to go," Doro suggested.

"Not yet; a little longer, just a little."

He had not loosed her hands, but now he freed one of his own, and deliberately drew her face to his.

"You will in time," he whispered. He seemed to be smiling.

Doro made no answer; she could not speak. A shyness had seized her, which angered her by its power.

"Kiss me," Rex's voice asked.

She shook her head, but her chin was still cupped in his hand.

Then suddenly he kissed her.

She could feel all the smooth hardness of his

young face and all the violent shakenness of his young strength.

He released her gently, and said, panting between the words and yet in quite a tranquil voice: "To remember me by!"

They drove home talking of ordinary things. At the theatre entrance Rex said very quietly:

"You will remember!"

CHAPTER XXII

*"If once again before I die
I drank the laughter of her mouth
And quenched my fever utterly,
I say, and should it cost my youth,
'Twere well! for I no more should wait
Hammering midnight on the doors of fate."*

TRUMBULL STICKNEY.

“IT is really true,” Doro said. She looked meditatively at herself in the glass.

She had arrived, definitely, surely.

All the drudgery was past, the tedious preparation finished; the array of months, years, which had gone to make this one night, the scheming and foresight of Cavini and Averado, the *pension* life, the practice—practice—practice.

Somehow it did not, any of it, success, or work, or boredom, or excitement, seem to matter vitally in this hour.

Life merely meant going on being Carmen, or Mimi, or Giulietta, or Elsa, or any other heroine whose type she was.

The lethargy of over-excitement descended on her spirit like a pall.

She sat in the flood of light, gazing abstractedly at herself and seeing that other life at Hurstpoint, at Ione's . . . and Pan.

Work had made her forget; at least, it had done its inevitable service—it had dulled her memory.

How long ago, oh! how endlessly far away it was now, and yet to-night, recalling that time, she seemed to feel that ghost of a chill shudder of the soul which is experienced when one knows some hurt must come, which she had felt always there when memory had gripped her mind—as, physically, one waits for the recurrence of a pain, and at the first faint throb feels all one's body shrink away in terror.

Still on her face there were the stains of Art; her eyes were lilac-circled, her lips encarmined. She looked long at that face gazing so steadfastly into her own.

All the heavy days were over surely—and yet——

At any rate, the morning held distraction and flowers, and notes, and Press notices and interviews. The Ritz was besieged, and Doro answered to the call with a swing of the temperament which carried her to the other extreme of the night's sadness.

Averado puffed with complacency. That remark so dear to everyone of us, "I told you so," was his to chant unceasingly; his urbanity was like a coat of many colours, each more suave and silky than the last, to each new-comer offering congratulations.

Telegrams came from Rex and Rachel, from people she had known in town, and met last at Ione's house, where their conversation had skilfully avoided the actual mention of Pan's death, whilst

holding a note of challenge concerning Doro's actual participation in the whole affair.

She had said then to Ione:

"I wish you could be primitively natural to subtle people who cleverly suggest you are either immoral, a fool, or secretive! But you can't. It would be so absurdly melodramatic when you are insulted to get up and say all you feel and leave the house superbly! Simply, it isn't done; all that is left to you is to suggest that the oleanders are looking well or ask your inquisitor if she has a cook still, or some other vital life-question! And disliking them virulently afterwards doesn't do them any harm, or you any good, and that's so annoying too!"

To-day, at any rate, she had no need to long to answer anyone; all the messages were unsubtle and admiring.

Neither Ione, G, nor Tony wrote, however, and as Doro looked from the hotel window into the square below, a dazzle of heat and vista of emptiness at the siesta hour, the champagne sense of goldenness of life seemed to have deserted her again.

Success had given her something, but not somebody, and she minded dreadfully; she was really lonely in her hour despite the clamour of praise and eddy excitement.

She tried to talk it out with Averado, who, big and coarse in so many ways, had a soul which held no commonness, and who had prevented her by his

protection from applying the French red and white of stage life too literally.

He patted her hand gently.

“You are over-tired. Some divas try hysterics, you grow cynical. You have the advantage. So have I; it is hard work calming the nerves. For you, there is only discussion needed. I know! And what I do not know about women you could put in a flea’s hand.”

“How dreadful for you!” Doro said.

“No, not so. I like the learning. Nothing is so absorbing as temperament to watch, to exploit, to possess. Women who have not got it might as well be corpses for all of me. By temperament I mean the humour which has a cut in it, tears which can touch the heart, emotion which has beauty, passion which is headlong, splendidly heedless; discreet voluptuousness in a woman is repugnant. No, temperament is a gift of the gods, and it makes women goddesses!”

He patted Doro again.

“You have it—sleeping!”

“I think that it is dead, not sleeping,” she said with assumed tragicness, which sounded whimsical, and added: “I hope so, anyway!”

Averado burst out laughing.

“Dead! Ah, how I should laugh later at myself if I believed you, little one! As well say the stars die each night when they leave the sky. They depart, but they reappear! So will that ‘sleeping’

temperament, when least you expect it, and again I shall have that glorious pleasure, the intense enjoyment of repeating, 'I told you so!'

"You are a dear, Averado!" Doro told him rather listlessly; he looked almost awkward, but he was delighted.

A vast section of the public firmly believe stage managers and impresarios, anyone who holds a commanding position with regard to the commercial side of Art, to be arch villains, and the generally opulent appearance of these gentlemen rather adds to the impression of vice. Averado bore out his claim to this sad title in every detail: he was big, florid, moustached, and diamonded; he wore coats with rich fur collars, and a hat of such shine that it cheered a rainy day; his bulk was great, his clothes greater; he looked vulgar, easy-living, a happy libertine, and whilst he was, in point of fact, vulgar in some senses, he was, in every other, of primitive outlook; his humour might be broad, but his personal morality was narrow. And he enjoyed his reputation of a "dog"; it was far better than being one; he led three distinct lives: his stage life, in which he judged no one; his home life, where he possessed a husband's and father's privilege of judging everyone at the top of his voice; and his private life, in which he enjoyed his own mind. He was of small bourgeois stock, and, therefore, a pleasant snob, and the fact that Doro had belonged to the family of a *milord* gave Averado a very agreeable

interest in her, which again induced in him a far more paternal consideration than was usually bestowed by him on his protégées.

Of course, it was said he was in love with her, but it was always said he was in love with his latest discovery; to the type of public mind which believed this sort of thing, no actress or singer could be moral, and every manager must be a Don Juan.

"It is all so much more attractive for the box office," Averado said comfortably. "Strange what virtuous people will pay to look at anyone they think gorgeously sinful, and yet refuse to add to their church donation for the restoration of the effigies of saints!"

Doro was finding life strange in other ways: she was appreciating the vast difference a background, lack of it, can make.

At home, in town, she had been Tony's daughter; here she was a singer who had been born in a caravan, or near one, and for the first time she encountered patronage.

Later, she parried or paralysed it; at this time she was too inexperienced to deal with it, too hampered still by the tenets of the creed she had forsworn.

She discovered how "graded" artists can be, and she divined that, no matter how fêted and flattered they may be, or how lavish their host's hospitality, they are never entirely within the circle.

All her Hurstpoint outlook felt aggrieved; she discovered herself to be nothing very much, and a

little of everything, and it distressed her until, bored by herself, she suddenly dashed to the far extreme and began to entertain as all the opera world did.

At a big supper party, given in her honour, she met Savardi, and instantly liked him.

"Women always do," he said quite frankly; it was not possible to call him conceited, he merely acknowledged facts men and women hurled at him unceasingly in open admiration.

The son of an English woman and a Spaniard, the owner of a large private fortune, young, famous for his sporting skill, of immense physical strength, and an odd, arresting mentality, Savardi had had too much of everything all his life.

Miraculously, it had not spoilt him as it might have done; he was too sure of himself, of course, but he would have had to have been an archangel or a nonentity to have withstood his fate. As he had never tried to do so, naturally he found it a pleasant one.

He was twenty-five when he met Doro, and there was a rumour of a great match the Church and his house were arranging for him.

He fell in love with Doro at once; he had done it often before when a woman pleased him. He came up to her at the head of the horseshoe table, and with the very deftest mingling of politeness and trickery got rid of her supper partner and seated himself in his place.

Doro saw a big, young man, whose very black

hair made his blue eyes seem very light between their thick, short lashes, and whose mouth was charming; he looked so strong that he reminded her of Hercules.

He had perfect manners and spoke English faultlessly when he chose.

At the end of the supper he said tranquilly:

“You are the loveliest thing I have seen, and I am going to have a tremendous affair with you. I will call upon you to-morrow, if I may?”

He came, armed with green orchids which he gravely put into vases himself, explaining to Doro that servants had no *flair* in such matters. Then he sat on a silken cushion at her feet and kissed her hands almost reverently.

She felt unembarrassed and amused, and rather liked Savardi.

He made her conspicuous at once by taking the stage box for the season, and each night sending orchids of the same green and golden variety to her at the end of the opera.

Of course she encouraged him; only women of very little emotion, who are admired by dull men, fail to do so; your normal woman simply cannot help encouraging a man even when, from the very first, she is quite sure she does not and will never love him.

It may be selfish, it may be cruel, but life is so constituted that each of us takes the gift we are offered; if we did not we should go through days

with about as much attractiveness in them as farm interests provide for a town habitué.

By encouragement, one means not discouragement; Doro accepted Savardi's orchids, laughed at his wit, let him kiss her hands, and called him a "dear thing" and "cher ami."

It had not occurred to her that Spanish men have an iron control of themselves because they need it.

Savardi found her passionately engrossing; he was quite mad about her, and attempted no disguise of the fact; his own people paid no attention to it: naturally he must wander a little before settling down. And, of course, his prospective bride's relatives treated the affair in the same way; all the men had been similar, and many such experiences; everyone expected it would cost Savardi a great deal.

He was prepared to fling his fortune at Doro's feet; she drove him to the verge of frenzy; he could not understand her in the least.

She was this opera singer; night after night she appeared to a rapturous public, was one with the life; and yet when she received him she was a different being entirely, and talked with him in such a way he could not talk with her in his way.

The strain of this plain living and high thinking began to tell on him; he became thinner and, as a result, looked more attractive; he lost the "fine animal" look; it gave place to a certain rather pathetic, eager ardentness.

"You play with fire," Averado told her most admiringly. No speculation in all his career had paid him so well as the launching of Doro, and Savardi's adoration was, to him, merely another attraction for the box office; he thought Doro quite realized her rôle and Savardi's, wherein he was wrong. To Doro, Savardi was merely what he was—a man in love with her, with whom she was not in love; of course, the affair would end as it must; for the moment it was rather exciting. . . .

Until Savardi came to her dressing-room between the acts.

She thought he was pale and said so; his looks had not suffered, but his air of supreme fitness was less evident.

"I have a fever," he said slowly in English.

Doro's dresser slipped out; it was a long *entr'acte*, and she had been bribed beyond all reason.

Also, she considered *la Señorita* an extremely lucky being, and Savardi was nearly as good as a saint to the people: he was so rich and good looking and powerful.

Doro had five visions of him in her winged mirror, and she thought carelessly, for the *nth* time, what a fine thing he was. He came forward and laid his hands on her shoulders:

"Dolores, I love you."

His voice was so controlled, so chillily respectful, that for the moment Doro felt actually amused; then she looked up as she felt Savardi's long, persistent gaze, and met his eyes; as she did so, the

pupils expanded, covering all the blue, and in that instant she had a certain intuition that there was in him a force which other men had not in any such like measure: something which all the veneer of modernity, its influence, could neither conceal nor temper.

His hands pressed harder as he said:

“ I love you as I love the saints.”

This again did not sound frightening, though Doro could not know Savardi had never yet loved any human saint, nor ever would; but, in his mind, over-wrought, tired out by his love, frustrated desire, the amazing uncertainty of the whole thing, religion and passion, the two major forces in a man of his upbringing, mingled inextricably.

He bent lower.

“ Dolores.”

His breath stirred her hair, and she shivered a little.

“ A-h-h!” A long sigh escaped Savardi. “ At last!”

His hands slid lower and clasped her with an effect of steel-like gentleness; they touched her very lightly, but she could not escape from them.

His voice, breaking with passion, reached her only faintly.

“ My heart, my soul, I love you—you are like a flower of God—only love me, and I will keep you blossoming on the altar of my love—only love me. Always you look so cold, so much as if you pos-

sessed yourself. I cannot bear it any longer, I tell you, I cannot."

And he bent and kissed her.

The youth, the romance, that strange inextinguishable *wish* to love, which is in each of us and leads so many of us to commit the foolishness of our lives, were stirred by that kiss. Doro's lips did not answer the kiss, but they received it, and every lover dares to hope from that.

The moment died, Doro's will reasserted itself, and she felt inconsequently angry and almost humiliated.

She rose with a swift movement. Savardi's arms went out to her; his impassioned, wilful young face implored her; even in this moment Doro recognized his charm.

She said lamely, intensely conscious of the crass ordinariness of her words:

"Please—you must not—I should not have let you."

A flash of intensely resentful amazement passed over Savardi's face. His blue eyes narrowed; he looked a long look at her, then went slowly forward, and as slowly put his arms about her.

It was useless to struggle, but Doro strained away from him; he drew her back inexorably, near to him again.

A flood of Spanish words raced from his lips; his voice was pleading, stormy, adoring, masterful. At the end he said in English, "You shall," and at that

moment he had never been more Spanish in his heart, more pitiless, savage, and headlong.

He believed her scruples to be a pretence; he would not believe, as he had told her in vitriolic speech, that she could have seen him all these weeks, allow him to visit her daily, to kiss her hands, fetch her from the opera house in his car, and yet that he meant nothing to her.

"You shall *not*," he said now, his face so white it looked painted, his blue eyes blackly blazing, "also you *shall*."

And then deliberately:

"You are no longer your own, you are mine," and he kissed her again, holding her crushed up against him.

Between his kisses he adored her with most beautiful words, but Doro listened to none of them; she felt furiously humiliated with Savardi, and herself, for the kisses stirred her and his magnetism thrilled her, and she hated his dominion.

Then she realized he was no longer speaking of love, but of Cordova, and she listened. She heard him tell her they two would go to his villa at Cordova—"it is so lonely, so lovely, the nightingales sing there so maddeningly, and the roses are like a sea, and the orange blossom. . . . We will live there—you and I—you and I——"

His voice sank to a whisper; he pressed his face against her hair, kissing it.

And clearly, most poignantly, and with bitter

anger indeed, Doro realized he was not asking her to marry him.

She did not love him, she knew that, but in that instant she resolved that he should love her so utterly he should sacrifice everything for her; she would make him ask her to be his wife. She kissed him suddenly.

As he drew back, half dazed by the new happiness of it, she said: "Come to me to-morrow at the hotel. Kiss me good night now."

He kissed her, amazedly, quite gently, and left her. He believed his battle won, and already he had lost it! He went home feeling the world was a toy which was his to play with; he was at Doro's hotel by eleven, the green orchids in his hand, and, as well, a chain of emeralds by which the most virtuous woman must have felt tempted.

In the so clear light he was an attractive creature, so black of hair and lashes, so healthily bronzed, and his charming mouth looked very happy.

As Doro's maid closed the door, he took the floor in a stride and swept her into his arms, and kissed her for a full minute, then offered the orchids and emeralds.

"Nothing could match the wonder of your eyes, but perhaps you will accept these poor offerings?"

He drew her down on to the sofa, and kept one arm about her.

"It must stay there, please!" Every bit of me is

so afraid you may not be quite true—that you may vanish!”

In time they reached the subject of Cordova.

“We will motor there,” Savardi said gaily; “it will be divine, the road is bad, but quite lovely, darling.”

His voice grew lower, his eyes more ardent:

“Dolores, when?”

“At the end of the season,” she said, smiling into his eyes; “it would be impossible earlier.”

“Nothing is impossible,” Savardi declared vehemently, his wilfulness awakened instantly by the merest suggestion of a power before which he must give way. “Nonsense—a contract? Oh! I will settle Averado naturally. You shall sing the Mignon, and then——”

“Après ça le déluge!” Doro murmured.

He gazed at her with deep reproach.

“One should not laugh at love, it spoils it a little always.”

Doro thought with cynicism, having grasped exactly where she and Savardi stood in relation to one another, that, for a man of his outlook, his other views were rather paradoxical! She did not in the least understand that Savardi was merely quite natural. He could not marry an opera singer; that she and he of course understood, but, Dios! he could love one, and did.

It was no question of morality at all, simply of custom.

For a week, Doro let him come; she accepted his

gifts, which were quite exquisite; she took his kisses, she let him adore her; then, since he still did not make the obvious suggestion, she prepared to hurt him.

Again, he was in her dressing-room; he sat there every evening now during the longer *entr'actes*. Doro had been singing in *Pagliacci*, and stood before him in her ballet dress, tying a wreath of leaves upon her head.

Savardi could stand it no longer; he sprang up, and seized her in his arms.

"You are so beautiful, I cannot bear it," he said in a choked voice. "I cannot explain, it makes me feel helpless and fierce at once to look at you. This cannot go on, Doro, to-night——" His eyes sank into hers.

"To-night," she echoed, "yes, what?"

His eyes fell, his lips smiled against hers.

"Jesus, Maria, and José," he murmured boyishly. "What *does* one say?"

What he might have said just then, for he was a young man of no mean talent of speech, was lost for all time, for the dresser rushed in fussily, exclaiming noisily and incoherently. Behind her Tony entered.

He advanced upon Doro with a quiet, "Well, my girl," and as she clung to him silently he surveyed Savardi most directly.

Savardi murmured his name, and Tony supplied his own. Savardi's eyes neither widened, nor closed from stupefaction, and he kept his lips in a hard

line, but his brain reeled a little. No contretemps could shake his self-possession; he made a young man's adieu to an older man, and bowed over Doro's hand, then he went out—to his own despair. Here was a complication which crushed even his passionate optimism; of course, he had heard Doro's history very early in their acquaintance, and certainly the Spanish part of it had confirmed him in his own views, made his procedure indeed far easier.

He had believed and quite understood Doro's severance from her English friends; she was *tout court*, an opera singer, and as such meet to be loved as he did love her and intended to continue to love her.

Lord Rexford's re-entry into her life changed everything; he saw that with desperate clearness, and also that Lord Rexford was (he had grasped that fact instantly) the man of all men with whom his suit, such as it had been, would stand least chance.

He went to his father and mother, who were peacefully in bed, and with vehement gestures, and tears in his eyes, proclaimed his desperation.

After endless discussion, bitterest anger on both sides, kisses of forgiveness, he did what he had meant to do when he had first entered his parents' room two hours earlier.

He wrote a formal offer of marriage for Doro's hand to Tony, and added that he would do himself the honour of waiting upon Lord Rexford the following morning at eleven.

This letter he delivered at the hotel himself.

Tony had inquired about him almost at once . . . that is to say, he had chosen a cigar, lit it, enjoyed it for a few moments, and then asked.

"And who is Don Luis de Savardi? Which of 'em?"

"He's the only son."

"Wants to marry you, I suppose?"

Doro temporized.

"He is in love with me."

Tony nodded.

"Wants you to become his wife, of course. I don't wonder."

He looked with unconcealed distaste at the dressing-room; indeed, he seemed strangely out of place in it. He gave Doro no reason for his amazing appearance, nor had she asked one: it was so wonderful that he had come.

"You don't like it?" he said bluffly. "All this smell, and the heat, and all that? You couldn't."

"But I do. I love it in a way."

"Good God!" said Tony, not in the least profanely.

The idea seemed to stun him into silence for a little while; he sat smoking, his eyes roving, a hand on either knee.

At last he said:

"Why don't you marry him?"

For one instant she thought he meant Rex, but he went on blandly:

"Decent lookin' feller, sportsman an' all that, I believe. Why don't you?"

Doro had a malicious desire to be perfectly frank and say: "My dear, because he hasn't asked me, and never means to, unless he is forced to do so by my subtlety!" But she could not hurt Tony in this hour, when he had just come, when it was so wonderful a thing he should have come.

"Don't let's talk about Savardi," she said swiftly. "Tell me everything, everything, darling. How are Rex, G, the horses, home?"

"Oh, all right," Tony answered. "G's been a bit seedy, but then, hang it all, as Walters told her, time flies! Can't expect to race with the two-year-olds for ever, y'know!"

He jerked his head towards the theatre:

"I was in there all the time, listenin' to you." His gaze grew keener. "I'd as soon hear you in the drawing-room at home, Doro."

"Oh, my dear! Tony darling—don't you see?"

"We won't talk about it yet," Tony agreed with that obvious magnanimity we use about a small thing, in order to prepare the way for a real demand, in the hope the listener may be lured into a readier state of acceptance. "Early days to discuss affairs yet, eh?"

A funny little grin, which had an element of both bravado and sheepishness, deepened the lines round his mouth, as he watched Doro making up.

"Things don't change much," he said.

"On revient toujours?" Doro suggested, her green eyes suddenly brilliant with amusement.

One of Tony's foibles was a pretended aversion to any language save his own ("English is good enough for me, and you can't find a place to-day, don't care where it is, where someone won't understand it!") and now he merely stared; but it was evident that if he could not grasp each word, certain sentiments curiously applicable to certain conditions borne out by Doro's remark had filtered through to his brain.

"Lot of flowers," he remarked.

"Oh, one is rather spoilt."

"I believe you, my dear. You'll spare this evening to sup with me?"

"I'd break every engagement ever made to do it, darling."

He was genuinely pleased; he said bluffly, expressing his gratitude after his own manner:

"Of course, later one sees a thing differently."

Doro, perfectly accustomed to doing mental detective work of high order in connexion with Tony's conversation, grasped, after a moment's lightning research, that this was the *amende honorable* for having parted from her so bitterly. She went to him and knelt before him, her tulle skirt billowing out, and laid her hands on his knees; she looked very young in that moment.

"Dear Tony," she said gently.

Averado burst in at that moment, and burst out laughing; he stood in the doorway rocking to and fro, all his diamond studs palpitating like so many miniature suns, his rings glowing as he waved his hands.

When he had really finished his laugh, he apologized for it as heartily in Italian.

Tony sat on, surveying him with a stare beside which the salt-conversion look of fame would have seemed an inane smile.

Averado's class and type to him were "people," and nothing else, and his outraged gaze, after resting on Averado's somewhat unusual ornaments, travelled to his face and stayed there implacably.

Doro nervously mentioned his name, and Averado at once bowed from left to right. Tony was recovering from this shock when Rizini, the contralto, rushed in and embraced Doro; she was an immense woman, immensely corseted, and perfumed, and uncovered.

Tony surveyed her with much the same repugnant interest one bestows upon a mandrill or freak.

He rose, and muttering to Doro he would join her later, went back to his seat.

Averado and Rizini had had their uses, however. Tony felt a comfortable conviction that Doro could not wish to live in such surroundings, and that his plea to her to return might not fall upon such unheeding ears.

He had found life unbearable without her; he longed for her to be back; or, failing that, he longed for her to marry. The contemplation that she might continue to lead this life was infinitely distressing to him.

Rex and G and he seemed sometimes to be like dim marionettes jerking in time to a scheduled existence: there was no life in them. Rex was in town a great deal, and then G and he faced one another in the silence.

After a peculiarly bad week of that existence he had risen and said abruptly:

“I am going to Madrid.”

G had replied “Good!” and he had caught the early boat train.

He had felt extraordinary when he had stepped out at the frontier; for an instant the years had seemed to fall away, and he was back in the olden golden days, giving Francesca’s maid directions, arguing about the car; there were the same customs officers, clad in *opera bouffe* style, and the same military policemen in their absurd high hats; the same women with nasal voices, walking up and down offering croisson sandwiches and bowls of coffee and apricots.

Nothing had moved him so much as that revival of memory, or brought Doro so near; he had once carried her in his arms across this very line. . . .

Even the dusty heat of Madrid, where the noise of the trams seemed to penetrate even to his room

in the august hotel, the absence of all that which he considered alone made life bearable, could not drive that feeling of tenderness from his heart.

He dined early and went straight to the opera house and sat well back in his *loge*.

The burst of wild applause when Doro appeared had shaken him a little, but reconciled him not at all; the stage was not meant for the right sort of woman, anyone could see that, in Tony's opinion; he only marvelled that Doro had not already done so.

His prolonged inspection of her dressing-room, its smallness, heat, excessive light, the photographs—all signed "Yours ever," and inscribed to "Dolores Darling"—the idiotic mascots of black cats, heather horseshoes, old nails, and other equally incomprehensible and valueless trifles, the "clutter" of things everywhere, and the perfume of grease paint and strongly-scented flowers and Doro's beloved jasmine, had all combined to make Tony feel no human being could live in such an atmosphere and like it.

He went to the Casino restaurant and ordered the best supper he could devise, and sat outside the stage door in his hired car patiently waiting.

Doro flashed out to him in a cloak which had a wonderful green lining where silver birds sang ceaseless strains. She, too, was excited; she, too, had been roused by tender memories; and then, Tony's appearance, his claim to her, had given her

back that sense of belonging rightly; she tried to be amused by her own outlook, but it was a little difficult; finally she decided: "It isn't that I mind *other* people not being up to standard, it's that I do hate they're not wishing to recognize that I am!"

Yet when Tony pleaded, quite eloquently for him, that she should "chuck it all" and come home, the lure of her new life seemed to grow in strength and fascination; she could not give it up; she knew it quite suddenly; simply she could not. She adored the applause, the outward and visible sign of her value; her power was a never-ceasing joy to her.

She evaded a direct answer, and Tony thought: "Give her her head"; it was his *modus operandi* with any troublesome plunger.

Savardi's note pleased him; he awaited that conqueror's coming with interest.

Upon closer inspection, he decided Savardi pleased him mightily; he was a young man after his own heart; he detected no subtlety in him; he saw only a well-built youth who ardently wished to marry Doro; who possessed a name, an income, and could undoubtedly ride and shoot, and would be a great help to him in both those vital matters.

Savardi thought to himself:

"He will suspect nothing; he is comfortably stupid. Thank God he came early enough!"

He had passed a hideous night, cursing himself

his bad start. Rexford cheered and encouraged him.

There remained Doro.

"She's lunching here," Tony volunteered; "stay, too."

Doro entered, looking less like a prima donna than any woman could do; she was in white, and was wearing a white straw hat and no jewels, save Tony's string of pearls.

"Well, my dear," Tony said, kissing her, "here's a visitor for you."

Doro lifted her lashes at Savardi, and his heart raced.

He went very pale.

When Tony had strolled off to "get some cigars," he paled further; he looked all black and white pride—and obstinacy.

He knelt before Doro suddenly.

"To-day I have asked Lord Rexford for your hand in marriage—Doro——" He stopped because, literally, he dared not speak, but he kept his eyes fixed on her; she saw his lips trembling.

And, unexpectedly, she felt sorry for him; she had meant this to be a moment of triumph, and suddenly the wish deserted her.

Savardi whispered almost inaudibly:

"Mother of Christ, how I adore you!"

It might have been a prayer, but Doro knew it was not, and oddly, in that moment, Savardi seemed very boyish and appealing.

Perhaps he saw the softening in her eyes; he leant nearer and slid an arm about her very gently, and then, like a tempest breaking from clear skies, he kissed her with such passion that she felt as if she must faint.

The kiss grew less dominant, the breath struggled in her throat.

“My answer, my answer,” she heard Savardi saying, and his voice was as shaken as if he had been running; “open your eyes, my darling dear!” and there followed a torrent of adoring Spanish.

And his voice—so eager, so full of worship—stirred her, she could not help it. It was so sweet to be loved again, even if she did not love—and to have won—conquest is such balm to any hurt—and Savardi— And she had been lonely, too, after all——

“My Beautiful, mine, mine, mine,” Savardi stammered, and suddenly leant his face down on their hands clasped together.

And, somehow, it became impossible to say “No,” though she knew that only the wonder of the moment held her: Savardi’s demanding, splendid, insistent youth.

He lifted his head and smiled at her and said, with that swift swerve of mood which has its own attraction:

“I had no idea one could wish to be married until you came.”

Doro looked into his blue eyes between their thick lashes.

"You have relatives in the Church, the Diplomatic?" she asked him gravely.

"But, of course."

His eyes did not drop . . . his outlook had been so far removed from hers that he entirely failed to appreciate the fact any rebuke had been intended.

He knelt up now and took Doro wholly in his arms and kissed her, as she told him later, breathlessly: "Rather too Spanishy."

He laughed into her eyes:

"I will kiss you *à l'Anglais!*"

And he touched her cheek chillily with his lips.

"Like that!"

He stayed to lunch, he stayed to tea; Doro and Tony were to dine with him on the morrow in his home. Neither Doro nor Tony had realized what a Spanish engagement can mean; they were initiated into its first mysteries during the ensuing week.

Savardi, however, Tony liked better and better. No lover, be it known, is so circumspect, so chivalrous, so definitely "correct," as your Spaniard, and all that the unsuspecting Tony found entirely right and pleasing.

He was aware, though neither Savardi nor he had really discussed the matter, that, upon her marriage, Doro would have to give up her opera life. In Tony's and Savardi's opinion those events would

follow one another in true Shakespearean manner, "as the night the day."

If Savardi had any doubts on this matter, he said nothing of them.

He paid Doro assiduous court; he kept her in a whirl of life which seemed all sweetness, adoration, adulation, lovely gifts. She was fêted by everyone; Rexford's presence had given her new prestige.

Savardi and he accompanied her everywhere, and her progress in public places might have been that of royalty, for the interest it excited.

Doro did not think, would not let herself think; deliberately, as it is perfectly possible for any woman to do, she let herself be swayed by Savardi's insatiable youth and love; her life for the last two years had been desolate in her heart; Savardi had forced a way in, and if he had not lighted the lamps on that altar, those from his heart flung a far reflection on to hers.

Women have married for less! Doro, at least, loved the gaiety and quickness of him, his intense virility, as women generally do love precisely those qualities because they stir their pulses, and, at any rate, move life from its ordinary rut.

Secretly, Doro fully intended continuing her career; she foresaw the struggle, and she ardently hoped it would take place before her marriage; struggles after were apt to be half and half victories on either side, she had noticed.

A remark of Savardi's made late one night when

he was endeavouring to kiss her good night, a feat which seemed likely to be accomplished towards early morning, awoke her from her trance-like *laissez-aller* frame of mind. He was sitting on the sofa holding her in his arms and kissing her quite gently, and he said, his lips against her hair:

“*Dios!* Life is very hard, difficult. I wish that I might shut you up for ever, so that no one might gaze upon your beauty but myself.”

He was quite serious; his blue eyes burnt with longing.

“I should stifle, my soul would, leading a life like that,” Doro said.

He put a cool hand upon her throat.

“But we should *belong* so—all of you would be mine——”

“Ah, *we* should belong . . . ?”

Remembering, she felt a chill of dread; the struggle no longer loomed, partly worrying, partly amusing; it would be a thing of deadly seriousness.

It was useless to look to Tony for any help; she knew his views.

There remained: to break her engagement.

Averado broached the question to her; he had contracts with her which had still five years to run.

“Of course I shall fulfil them,” Doro told him. “But naturally!”

Averado was enchanted to hear it, also amazed; but the latter emotion he hid, nor did he mention to Doro that Lord Rexford had asked him, much as

an enemy offers armistice, what price he required to break those contracts.

The last week of the season dawned in a blaze of heat, and bull-fights, and fiestas of every description, and with it there dawned Rex, quite cool, as languid as ever, and self-possessed.

He certainly made a foil for Savardi with his fairness and languor, his low, always, it seemed, slightly amused, voice, and utter lack of gesture.

"So it is true?" he asked Doro.

He studied her.

"And you are as happy as you want to be?"

"Is anyone ever that?" she asked him a little sadly. She wished Rex had not come; somehow his coming seemed a reproach, and yet there was nothing about which she need feel self-reproach.

Savardi and he were polite to one another. Savardi divined all he would never know, and his divination gave him little peace where Rex was concerned.

And Rex appropriated Doro so calmly; he was always in her dressing-room, at the hotel, driving her, riding with her.

Savardi neither liked nor understood his type; to him it appeared bloodless and self-sufficient; Rex had none of his tastes and few of his views and yet seemed to have lived a great deal, and certainly he was no fool.

Again, Rex's friendships were extraordinary; he appeared actually to like the robust and pushing

Averado, who treated him, Savardi noticed, with no effusion, and yet would do things for him he would never do for other men, Savardi included.

Only Savardi's sister, Renée, raved about him and his fairness, and his smile, and his voice.

Doro suspected Rex of a ridicule he did not show. She taxed him with it, and he denied it with a little smile.

"Do you like Savardi?" Doro asked him.

He met her gaze levelly.

"Of course, I am consumed with jealousy of him; I think he's a sportsman, and his manners are delightful, but one appreciates the mixture of savagery and haute finesse which distinguishes him!"

Savardi and he went to the big bull-fight, to Doro's amazement and disgust.

He was in Tony's sitting-room when she went there to seek Tony.

"You are back?" she asked.

"Yes. Savardi was entertaining a crowd, but I preferred to come home."

"Did you like it—the fight?"

"No, I loathed it."

"Why did you go, then?"

She was genuinely surprised.

Rex opened his eyes—they had been closed (he was lying full length on a sofa, his hands clasped behind his head)—and said:

"Savardi asked me, hoping I would refuse. So I went."

"But—why? It sounds so absurd."

"Oh, he understands quite well."

A storm was coming up; the sky was livid orange flecked with purple clouds, the trees shivered.

"How still it is!" Doro said.

"Yes, the hush before a tempest: forced calm is always a portent."

He looked at her fixedly.

"Doro?"

"Yes?"

"When is your marriage?"

"Heaven knows!"

"It may, possibly does; but will that fact content Savardi? It would not me—does not, in point of sordid fact; there are such things as trains and boats, y'know, in connexion with a return trip."

"You are going back?" Doro asked obviously.

"Of course."

"Rex," that curiosity a woman never quite loses with regard to a man she knows has loved her made her question him, even while she realized her unwisdom and perhaps lack of kindness. "Rex, why did you come?"

"The better to see you, my dear!" he said, smiling a little.

"Ah—just—just that?" Her voice sounded flat with disappointment.

"I wanted to see what kind of a man Savardi was, if he'd take care of you."

"And you think he will—you approve?"

"He's a decent being with very obvious limitations, and they are better than subtle, hidden ones."

A smile quivered on Doro's lips. She thought of Savardi's first attempt to win her: was he so un-subtle?

And what would Rex have said had he known? She felt glad he never would.

Rex asked suddenly:

"Do you intend to go on singing after your marriage? One imagines not: it's rather difficult to imagine Excelentissima giving full vent to Delila's passion-broken cry!"

Doro went across to the sofa and stood beside it, and looked down at Rex.

"Rex, what shall I do? I don't want to give up my career."

"No, I know; but I fear you will have to. The fact you do not wish to will alter very little."

She felt hurt by his impersonal tone of lightness, and chose to retaliate.

"Savardi adores me," she said.

"In his way," Rex answered very quietly; "but unluckily, loving you his way will not give you yours. It never does. One has to love a person more than oneself to be able to do that. However," he sat up and drew out his cigarette-case, "you can give up your way."

Doro turned and sat down on the sofa close to him.

"Oh, Rex," she said helplessly.

He rose and walked to the window, and lit his cigarette there.

Doro looked at him silhouetted against the dangerous glow of the sky; his profile stood out with a sort of hard determination, and suddenly it occurred to her that virility is not always super-evident, it might exist under self-repression, and exist the more intensely therefore.

The excitement which a coming storm always can induce awoke in her: Rex was too self-controlled, his aloofness made her resentful. He had not always been so very still and repressed, and "apart"!

If he had not come, life really would have been easier; his coming had not made her love Savardi more, exerted the influence the return of one old lover can exert; Rex had simply formed a contrast, and her mood was too variable to desire any further agitation.

Savardi came in, and saw Rex first; his blue eyes glittered.

Then he kissed Doro and talked with her in the tone young men like to use to their womenkind, a tone of voice which, if it had been addressed to children, might be described as soothing, and as addressed to a woman deserves the adjective "soft" in its least polite sense.

Rex continued to stare out of the window at the darkening street, the low bending trees, and lifting awnings; the air felt as if there were no wind, and

yet all things moved in a frightened, hurried way.

Savardi "wished to God" in his own mind that Rex would go, and continued to murmur to Doro. He was intensely wrought up, the bull-fight had lit its usual excitement in him; much excellent champagne had not tended to lessen that effect.

He wanted to kiss and kiss Doro, but this man stood there in priest-like inactivity

"You liked the fight, Señor Greville?" he inquired suddenly.

"Oh yes, thanks."

"You approve of our sport, then?"

"But why not, Don Luis?"

Nothing to be gained that way.

The hour dragged; at last Savardi left, just before the storm broke.

"I cannot drive to the opera house in this," Doro said, watching the hailstones beat the street. "It would be impossible. Heavens, Rex, what an irritating thing life is!"

As he still did not speak, she said, a little nervously, laughingly:

"I think I want to be comforted."

The words took them back to Hurstpoint, to the old life.

"Rex, I'm so uncertain. . . ."

She longed for him to question her; he said levelly:

"You are engaged, y'know. No one forces that sort of thing on one."

"Circumstances do!" Doro answered sombrely. He would not look at her; his steady eyes gazed reflectively at the sodden road.

Suddenly Doro demanded:

"What did G think of my engagement?"

"Oh, she hoped you'd be happy, and so on, and so forth!"

He smiled at her.

"G was quite as she should have been!"

He spoke with a double truth, one half which was heard only personally, for G had "taken it well" for both Doro and himself.

She had not questioned Doro's choice; she had certainly wished her every happiness, and she had clasped Rex's head between her fine withered hands and drawn it down on to her shoulder; if he had felt, reading the letter of announcement, that all the glow and romance of life was ended, she had felt for him, through him, as if life had ceased to have any value.

If his love for Doro had been of the stocky, "used" kind, the kind which may begin in earliest youth and settle down, from lack of ambition on the part of the lover, to a state of well-wishing, well-being, placidity, she would have been sorry for his disappointment, but not broken by it at all. But she knew that some men are so constituted that one love may fill their lives to the exclusion of all else, and that by the possession of the woman they love alone will they attain happiness.

Rex had been no anchorite, but he had never spoken of any woman with love save Doro. G knew him through and through, knew his passion for beauty, the subtlety of his mind, his deadly obstinacy. These three things had all fused in his love for Doro.

"I will have the best or nothing," he had once told G doggedly.

It had been she who had advised him to go to Madrid; he had meant to go, she divined, and she had made the way as easy for him as she could; now he was there, and that was all that could be said.

Doro's engagement endured, he would make no appeal. He recognized Savardi's defects and virtues, and knew him to be as much in love as his nature would allow him to be with one woman at one time. He saw Doro did not love him, and yet would marry him, unless someone deliberately stopped her. He realized with austere clarity that he should return to England; he approved Savardi's dislike of himself, and despised himself for exploiting it.

This evening he knew he must not stay; if Doro did not love Savardi, neither did she love him, and his presence confused her power of concentration.

He said:

"I am going back to-morrow, my dear. In this weather I prefer Hurstpoint."

"You are going to-morrow?" Doro said. Her heart sank. "Oh, why?"

"Lots of reasons; chiefly, I want to!"

The room was nearly in darkness; they could see one another's faces in a pale blur.

"Don't go," Doro said; she crossed to him and laid her hand on his arm. "It's—it's—been so—so splendid having you. Savardi——"

"Doesn't like me, but is nice about me—is that what you are going to say?" he interpolated.

"He does like you."

"My dear, he does not, nor I him."

"How absurd! And anyway, if it is so, why?"

Rex wondered if women were deliberately cruel, or merely nervously so; he felt a hard inclination to take Doro's hand tightly in his own and crush it into his and tell her: "Because we both love you, because he suspects I do, and I know he does; because I hate to see him touch you, hate to think of the hours he can kiss you; hate him for being first when it is not my fault I am not, and just chance, luck—call it what you will. And I hate him because it makes me dishonourable to myself."

Instead, he said:

"Simply, we don't hit it. Although we are both rather nice people in our different way!"

He clung to any form of humour, went on talking in the same vein to escape the tension he felt threatened.

Never since he had come to Madrid had he felt so utterly stirred as he felt now; never had Doro striven so to reach him. The storm was sweeping his nerves, too: the room grew even darker; he knew if he did not go that he would later not forgive himself. He longed with a parched sensation of driven, longing to break down the frail barrier between himself and Doro, and implore her to free herself. He longed to tell her of the sleepless nights and weary days he had lived through for love of her. Just this quiet intimacy was a danger in itself.

He made himself say nonchalantly:

“I must be off, my dear. I’ll come round in the morning, if I may, to say good-bye.”

He did not attempt to take her hand; he reached the door and switched on the light, and looked back at her.

“Au ’voir, then.”

He closed the door, and stood alone in the vast corridor; that deadly ache born of the knowledge of chance foregone, a meeting he had longed to last, ended, seized on him.

He asked himself the questions one does ask futilely:

Why had he not stayed just a little longer? Why had he been so unnecessarily offhand—he had not wished to go in reality, and with every thought and instinct he longed to return to Doro.

The dimly-lit corridor looked like the dreary

entrance to any place of repentance ; it was stamped with unoriginal neatness and worth.

How banal, to leave all your heart's happiness in such a hotel—to part from everything which made life beautiful in one of those over-furnished, garish little rooms.

Rex realized the power to hurt which, speaking ordinarily, things can possess.

He walked away and down the wide, thickly carpeted steps.

Outside it had stopped raining for a little while, but the sky hung low like a dark menacing wave about to break.

Lightning cut into it with streaks of silver fire ; no thunder followed, but the air seemed to suffocate itself, it was so dense, so heavy.

Rex walked out and crossed the square, an acacia tree in front of him suddenly bowed, as if a violent hand had pulled it downwards, and at the same moment a second storm burst.

He ran, still limping a little, to the first shelter he saw, a faintly lighted oblong.

He pushed blindly at it, and found a half-opened door, and slipped in. Voices sounded indistinctly ; someone laughed, a man ; someone sang.

Rex, his eyes becoming used to the dim light, discovered that he must be in the private entrance to the Café du Nord ; dimly, he could hear a band ; he seemed to remember the location too.

The rain fell in a deluge ; he decided to stay where

he was, and walked forward and sat down on the linoleum-covered stairs.

The room on the top landing was obviously occupied by rather happy revellers.

Bursts of song were interrupted by roars of laughter. Rex remembered the bull-fight, and understood this otherwise unnaturally early celebration.

He lit a cigarette: it seemed extraordinary that to-morrow at this time he would already be so far away; it seemed extraordinary simply because he would be acting directly against his wishes, even his will.

He had never loved Doro as he loved her now, now that he and she had both savoured life apart; her "newness" at this reunion had been an added delight; it had seemed to give her an added charm, or perhaps to make all the other qualities he so loved in her more wonderful.

He tried to think what he would do with life, how he should pass the time which loomed so menacingly before him now.

Time became an enemy with every advantage, when you loved and were not loved again; one might struggle, deny, pursue one's interests vehemently, one did not escape.

He supposed he would go back to London and stay there and read of Dolores in the papers—and hate Savardi as much as ever.

For, deep down, he hated him, and though the origin of his motive was obscure, he knew it resulted in contempt.

He despised him for some quality he could not place in him, but at the same time he felt he was never wholly just to Savardi because of his jealousy.

And at that moment, oddly, he heard Savardi's voice. He was shouting a name, Doro's.

Rex flushed in the dusk. "Young cub! He is drunk, of course!"

Another voice shouted clearly:

"To the marriage day!"

Apparently there was a vast filling of glasses.

Rex rose and prepared to leave; he had reached the door when another voice, young, rather thick, reached him easily:

"Never meant to marry the fair Dolores—only her father insisted——"

Oaths, shouts, laughter, expostulations broke out. Rex, strung up by the day's demand, took the stairs in a couple of strides and opened the door of the room.

Savardi and a youth were struggling together. Half a dozen other young men were cursing and laughing, and endeavouring to separate the combatants. As Rex entered, the youth broke free; his face was bleeding where Savardi had struck him.

He spat out venomously:

"It is the truth. All our family knows it is the truth; all Madrid knew Luis would not marry an opera singer! He had arranged to take her to his villa at Cordova; my father saw the settlements, then this Lord Rexford appeared . . ."

His friends had been restraining Savardi; now one whispered Rex's name, and Savardi spun round, and they faced one another.

Into Rex's mind, rocking in a very tempest of white rage, the thought slid, like a sliver of ice: "Now I know why I distrusted him."

He walked across the floor and stood within a foot of Savardi; they were of even height, their eyes met levelly.

For a moment neither moved; then Rex, lifting his hand, struck Savardi lightly in the face, smiled at him faintly, and drew back.

Savardi laughed in his throat; his friend, Miguel Martinez, stepped forward, bowed to Rex, and proffered a card; he began a set speech in Spanish.

Rex took the card, tore it in two, and, still staring at Savardi's chill white face and burning eyes, struck him again, lightly, as before.

Savardi closed with him, and he had the soul-satisfying feeling of having his enemy at grips at last; the *élan* which succeeds rage possessed him, he was lifted entirely above his earlier mood, and felt an amazing lightness. Neither man spoke, and there was silence in the close, crowded room. Savardi nearly swung Rex clear once, but a moment later Rex deliberately thrust Savardi off his feet, and by sheer appalling effort beat him to the floor.

As he did so, he felt his weak side stabbed by a hideous pain; a haze floated before him, but through it he could see Savardi on the floor still.

He gave a little laugh, and mechanically stooped to offer his hand to the fallen man.

Others ran forward; he turned away and walked to a dusty mirror, set in tarnished gilt, with bunches of paper flowers at the four corners, and fastened his collar and tied his tie meticulously.

Then, still upright, he walked out of the room and down the stairs.

It had stopped raining, and he felt vaguely thankful for the momentary coolness.

He was in such pain that he could scarcely think coherently; he knew he must reach his hotel, but he did not remember which way he went.

A tram clanged past and stopped; he reached it, murmured the name of the hotel, and heard the man answer, watched him wave his hand energetically, and realized he was quite near it.

He managed to gain his room; his man was there putting out his dinner clothes.

Rex said to him, collapsing on the bed:

“Get a doctor, the best, and don’t let—don’t let a soul know—not—not his lordship—d’you see—go now—and be as quick as you can.”

Martin adored him; he was back with a doctor within five minutes, a little fat man, who was not quite innocent of the perfume of garlic, but who, the porter had informed Martin, was “as clever as the devil.”

He examined Rex and his sharp face grew

sharper; in the end he took out a syringe and gave Rex an injection.

"I leave to-night on the Paris express," Rex said to him quietly, freed from the pain; "if you can manage it, I should be glad if you could accompany me to Paris."

The doctor stared, then his heavy jowl quivered with anger.

"You do not," he argued dogmatically.

Rex winced with weariness.

"Oh, yes. Can you come, or do you refuse?"

"You understand you will be in great pain each inch of the way—you need absolute rest, scarcely a movement?" the doctor inquired with seeming relish.

"Oh, yes."

"You may think you are a brave man, but I shall be a braver, if I go," the doctor said glumly.

But he was poor, and he was well aware this Englishman was rich; all the English appeared to be four things: rich, pig-headed, conceited, and without religion.

Martin and he carried Rex into the train, and the doctor sat beside him in the stuffy *wagon-lit*.

Rex kept his steady, tired eyes fixed on the sky: morphia never dulled his mind nor made him sleep.

He had sent Doro and Tony a note saying he was leaving by the night express, and that had been all.

He seemed to feel nothing now but the pain, and a certain gladness that he had beaten Savardi.

His mind could not struggle with the reason for the fight; he needed its balance to help him keep physical control of himself.

In Paris he bade Espada good-bye, and sent for a man he knew well—a young Frenchman who had been his friend at Oxford and who was mad on surgery and science. He bandaged Rex and took him to his own house and talked to him of his loves, and work, and of much science, and more emotion.

Rex bore his kindness for a week; then, swathed like a mummy, cursed for his foolishness with every good French curse known to his infuriated and devoted doctor, he left for London and his own home.

He was fond of the town house in his way; he liked its cool spaces, its view of St. James's, its intimate association with all things which had passed, but passed with dignity; it was too big a place, of course, and very darkly furnished, but it was home and his own, and he longed with almost passionate ardour for a little peace in his own country.

His bedroom overlooked the Green Park, now the haunt of the happy loiterer, and he used to lie and watch the first leaves drift down, as the hot sun kissed them loose. He wondered, as everyone does at some time or another, generally during unhappiness, how many of the passers-by were glad or miserable, what loveliness or tragedy had touched their lives.

He was not lonely at this time; de Gries' report on his injured back, Hume's grave verdict after the examination, the constant pain, made him at once too depressed and tired to mind much who was with him or away.

But when, as it seemed miraculously, G entered his room one late summer afternoon, he knew he had missed her all the while.

She was in black muslin and pink roses, a frivolous sunshade all black chiffon and roses had replaced the ebony stick, real roses were pinned in her corsage by very real diamonds indeed, and all about her there hovered the sweet fragrance she affected, which Rex had loved so as a little boy.

She stood beside his couch and smiled down at him. "Well, well," said she in that caressing "little" voice women use to their children when they have hurt themselves.

"How did you hear I was back?" Rex asked.

"I met Sir Keith at a garden party affair, and he told me everything except the bits you will tell me later on!"

Sweet, aged and funereal, came in to remove her mistress's things, and incidentally to give herself the tremulous joy of commiserating with Rex.

"Indeed, you do look badly, sir," she said with gloomy respect; "worn to a shadow, crooil thin, if I may say so. I suppose, sir, the doctor thinks it'll be a long job?"

"Years, Sweet, dear," Rex replied instantly, "if, indeed, I ever regain my former briskness."

Sweet murmured scripturally about "giving and taking away," then roused herself to give a spirited account of an illness, similar to Rex's it seemed, which had been suffered by a member of her own family and had run a course of such serious nature that it had included every known ailment, the sufferer, however, succumbing to none till old age had taken its toll.

"Cheery outlook," Rex commented, enjoying Sweet immensely.

He felt quite different already; he had never realized he wanted G; but now that she had come, he knew he had, unconsciously, missed her all the time.

Simply her presence, the familiar perfume she used, her low yet "crisp" voice, the sense of individuality she gave to a room (which is so great a gift and possessed by so few people) served to create an atmosphere of pleasurable contentment. He forgot his back, Madrid, the longness of the day.

Martin came in smiling; flowers, which Rex had been too dispirited to ask for, appeared magically, tea boasted special cakes.

G, secretly intensely distressed by Rex's pallor, his obvious weakness, decided instantly that she would stay in town indefinitely; she dispatched the outraged Sweet to Pointers with instructions to

return "by return," accompanied by Nick, the terrier, and such garments as she and Sweet would need.

In her own old room, which she had occupied as a girl, she lay down to rest for a while.

Naturally, she was consumed with anxious curiosity as to the reason for Rex's illness, his abrupt departure from Madrid. Age had been kind to her; G often acknowledged that, insomuch that it had detracted nothing from her mentality, and had added to it a very temperate philosophy: but philosophy very seldom takes rank with love, and G's love for Rex was the dominant factor in her life.

She cursed Doro's entry into the family in her mind, since Rex had suffered by it.

She remembered the November evening, years before, when Doro had seemed a being of cool, yet flamboyant youth, and Rex had spoken first of her loveliness; she, G, should have foreseen then, but she had trusted to the value of propinquity, which breeds so wholesome a familiarity.

She admitted now to herself that she had entirely failed to discount the influence one love may have in awaking love; she had ignored the strange, yet often inexorable effect the mere fact of love being felt by one person may have quite unconsciously on another nature, seeming to attract as if by an invisible aura, exerting an involuntary spell by reason of its own intensity. Now, she knew that,

in all probability, had Pan and Doro never loved, Rex might not have cared; Doro, until that new aspect of her had been presented to him, would have remained the being of close dearness and no more to Rex.

But it had happened, and regret was futile. Lying here in the room which had once watched her own hour of storm, her thoughts moved slowly to her own youth.

People said age forgot, failed to sympathize because it had grown out of touch; to-day she remembered, as if it had been yesterday, the anguish of those summer months when she, like Doro, had loved a man of straw.

She felt herself a ghost of herself, gazing pitifully at her own anguish.

Ah, age forgot nothing; and when it still loved, it only suffered anew in the sufferings of the one it loved!

By the memory of her own grief she knew Rex's pain.

She dined with him in his room, and later they sat in the darkness lighted only by the reflection of lamps from the park.

The trees rustled softly, sighing for relief that the heat of the day was over; occasional steps sounded from below; Nick, restored to his one love by the reluctant, but speedy Sweet, lay, a too warm, but adoring weight in the crook of Rex's arm.

"It was all damnable," Rex said suddenly, his cigarette glowing for an instant. "I made a hideous mistake in going."

And he told G every detail he could remember.

"Savardi is the Carpentier type, y'know; he conquers by force. Doro does not love him; she was uncertain of life when he entered it; she had achieved so much so quickly, of course all the future seemed flat. And she isn't the exact type; she has been too much herself in a real rôle to be entirely herself in an artificial one. All the while she wants something and isn't quite sure what. Really, it is just what everyone wants: to be understood. She wants to go on, and yet have a stable background. She would never acknowledge it, I suppose. Perhaps, honestly, she has not realized it, but what she wants is a husband like me: a man who would give her her head and keep his, give her his heart and keep hers. It's rare, I know, and I only sound a conceited fool, but I could do it. If you specialize on one woman, you do get an idea of how to treat her. I've specialized on Doro through all the years that matter most. No other woman has ever wakened a fraction of feeling in me; I've wasted nothing, not from virtue or careful hoarding, but simply because I've been so 'held' by Doro that I've concentrated almost unconsciously. I could give her life as she wants it. Savardi will take her and lose her in a year; he only wants her because she did not want him. Already he is bored by the exigence of her demand for freedom, by her entirely

opposite conception of what an engagement should be. He is of his type, G, and a fine specimen at that. Big, generous, spoilt, bigoted, and selfish. And his outlook is that of his kind. He hoped, in the first instance, to make Doro his mistress; he asked for her in marriage because he recognized that chance, in the shape of father's advent, had given her the best cards. When I learnt that I thrashed him—rather publicly.”

“So that is the reason,” G said guardedly; she longed to take his head and press it to her heart and tell him she was proud of him, but neither of them had ever been demonstrative, and it seemed late, in every sense, she reflected with a wry smile, as the clock struck twelve, to begin!

“I am damn glad I did it!” Rex went on unemotionally. “I suppose one's made so, or one never really deadens the primitive instinct, but there's something intensely and passionately satisfying in holding a man's body in your arms when you hate him furiously, and feeling you can beat its strength. When my back is devilish painful I think of the moment I lifted Savardi clear, and then threw him, and, by God, it helps me to feel better!”

After a long pause, he said:

“Of course, Doro never knew—about Savardi's first feeling for her—or, naturally—about the fight.”

“So she'll marry him?”

“Oh, yes. Probably they are married.”

He shifted on his pillows, and Nick cuddled closer.

"Y'know, G it's the most extraordinary thing, the way one envisages an empty life. I want Doro so much that I can't get a perspective of life without her. One would think love must meet a love such as mine, to make a complete thing—but it doesn't. Married, she'll be the same to me. I can't feel, shall not be able to, as men say they do, when the woman they love marries, that it's as if she were dead to them. Dead! When she breathes and laughs and moves in the world, and you might see her any minute! If she were dead you'd be at peace, and there is no peace for any lover whilst another man lives and takes his fill. I would to God I had killed Savardi, and paid for it."

When his voice ceased it was as if a brilliant tongue of flame died utterly to ash; the air had vibrated to passion, now it was void, exhausted utterly. G knew she had nothing to say to him; she had never dreamt he felt, could feel, like this; she had believed his casualness signified a patient, easy love; she now discovered that tranquil self-possession to be an assumption; below it glowed white-hot idolatry, allied, as is so often the case, to primitive instincts.

It was almost impossible to imagine him fighting Savardi; it was even more strange to recognize utter truth in that headlong statement, "I wish to God I had killed Savardi, and paid for it."

"Oh, my dear, my dear," G said wearily.

Rex gave a short laugh, meant to convey comfort, to lighten the impression of his last words.

"It's all right," he said hurriedly.

They spoke of other things, but G went to her room fighting an intense depression; life itself seemed empty, as ashen at that moment when Rex's voice had ceased and silence swathed them in its numb folds.

CHAPTER XXIII

*" My heart was winter-bound until
I heard you sing;
O voice of Love, hush not, but fill
My life with spring!*

*" My hopes were homeless things before
I saw your eyes;
O smile of Love, close not the door
To paradise!*

*" My dreams were bitter once, and then
I found them bliss;
O lips of Love, give me again
Your rose to kiss!*

*"Springtide of Love! The secret sweet
Is ours alone;
O heart of Love, at last you beat
Against my own!"*

FRANK DEMPSTER SHERMAN..

SAVARDI told nothing, and learnt with vast relief that Rex had left Madrid, and with even greater satisfaction that he likewise had kept silence. He had not entirely believed that he would speak—that much honour he paid him—but the subtlety which he chose sometimes to make appear a veneer for his real self, but which in reality lay at the core of his nature, influenced by heritage and cultivated by choice, had long since urged him to

distrust the actions of any man who was his rival. He hated Rex implacably for beating him, and loving Doro; he respected him only because he had, as he thought, discretion.

That Rex had gone because his love was greater than his hatred, and his consideration for the woman he adored stronger than both, he never imagined; that type of affection did not enter his code.

He himself went to Doro early because his headlong infatuation for her allowed him to suffer any anguish rather than suspense, and he found, after a few minutes' speech, that she was entirely ignorant of the evening's débâcle.

Doro told him Rex had left "suddenly," and he made no comment whatever; he had always believed in sparing lies, and, indeed, in never lying unless the occasion was an essential one.

Now he put an arm round Doro and kissed her, then gave her the gift he had brought, either as an offering of devotion or an atonement.

In any case, it was a quite beautiful mantilla, and had the arms of the family woven into the design. After the observation that the eldest-born daughter of the eldest son was christened in the veil, Savardi launched into an impassioned plea for the date of their marriage.

Almost coincidentally Averado entered, brandishing a London contract just arrived, and bristling with exuberant triumph.

It was scarcely the moment for this announcement, and Savardi, his bruised face flushing darkly, broke into a torrent of exasperated speech.

Averado listened equably, bowed, and went out after a long glance at Doro.

As the door closed, Savardi had her in his arms.

“Madre de Dios, does it never seem to you that I feel anything? Do you not care what I suffer? I wait and wait on your word, and you do not give it; a little actor-manager offers you a contract and you will sign at once, and no matter when our marriage takes place! You must not, you shall not. It is impossible, I tell you, impossible.”

He released her to gesticulate with eloquence, his blue eyes narrowed in anger, his mobile mouth quivering.

“I love you, I love you,” he said vehemently. “You are my affianced wife; all that I have I will give you to make up for this career you must renounce. God in heaven! what will our life be if you forever sing?”

And suddenly he was at her feet, adoring, humble, his ardent face almost timorous: she could not, she could not love him so little that she could sacrifice his love for a song? Ah, he adored her like a saint, like a flame. . . .

“Feel—feel. . . .”

His heart leapt against her hand under the thin silk shirt.

And out of a whirl of kisses, supplication, anger, despair, wildest adoration, he was gone.

"I must make some decision," Doro told herself wretchedly, and again she longed for Rex, his impartiality, the sense of cool support he gave somehow.

She must choose one way or the other: and if she chose a career, what then?

Just a career.

If she chose marriage?

Ah, well! A devotion, someone to belong to, to laugh with, a sharer of life. . . .

But if Savardi had only been willing to share her life a little.

"I want the impossible," she told herself with bleak truth. "A man who will let me be myself, and his as well!"

Suddenly, in the midst of settling up the end of the season, arranging the future, disputing it, Tony's old enemy, malaria, claimed him; he was ordered back to England immediately.

Savardi, secretly furious, could do no less than commiserate and agree that Doro must accompany him.

Tony had never imagined she would not. Savardi and he had one quality at least in common, a superb selfishness.

Averado travelled, too, to London, enacting, as a matter of course, his John the Baptist rôle, his rendering of it shining out with special success at

railway stations and on the way to the dining car.

He said nothing of work, but his soul exulted that he and Doro would be in London at the same time. Covent Garden was his Mecca and Paradise, and each mile nearer to it filled him with joy.

Savardi left them at Paris; he was to fetch Doro later.

As he stood on the ugly, dark, Gare du Nord platform, bareheaded, smiling at Doro, he seemed very securely young and self-confident. Their hands clasped, Savardi sighed with Spanish sentiment, and his blue eyes glittered for a second as his glance crossed that of an extremely pretty midinette tripping towards the barrier.

"I shall think every minute only of you until we meet," he said to Doro; the train, already moving, caught his words and crushed them in its jaws of noise; Savardi turned away and began to walk swiftly; Doro watched him, and as she did so she seemed to lose the impression she had had of him so long, and he became, mysteriously, merely a good-looking young man in search of adventure.

The parting brought, as it often does, reaction; now it seemed possible to feel a sense of an (paradoxically) oppressive relief. At any rate, the journey had begun, and that meant respite from farewells, from protestations.

For a little while now she could rest, safe from adoration or adjuration.

"I am impossible," she told herself with chagrin. "I accept without gratitude, and yet want without knowledge, and am all the time dissatisfied because I am not understood!"

Throughout the journey that sense of harassing futility held her.

For self-comfort she adopted the creed of reaction and overtiredness, and found in neither any real satisfaction or any antidote to her mood of lethargic inappreciation.

Even being in town again gave her no quickening pulse. Victoria looked as if she had never left it, or rather just as she had left it years before.

The Stafford Hotel, whither Tony decreed they should go for the night, was as exclusive and imposing as ever; the same heat haze hung over the streets of dusk as had hung that other summer. . . .

"I'm off to bed early, m'dear," Tony announced. "S'pose you'll not be late?"

"I'll sit up a little longer, I think," Doro answered. She carried a chair to the window, and lay back in it, gazing at the stars.

To-morrow—Hurstpoint and Rex. . . .

What was Savardi doing now?

Had he caught up the pretty girl with the arched eyebrows?

How many women became engaged because it seemed the easiest thing to do, from a desire of conquest, or that fatal and cruel kindness which actually springs from vanity, and, whilst declaring

its foundation to be an inability to hurt, cloaks its real mainspring of existence?

She supposed Savardi and she would "settle down." Life seemed singularly meaningless in some ways: one took what came because it came.

She clasped her hands behind her head.

Had every atom of fire really burnt out of her after Pan's death?

London brought him back so nearly, and this memory made her feel very lonely, reached certain depths in her which responded with an aching sadness; Savardi's love had touched her superficially, but that touch had laid open the way for this deeper feeling.

Oh, once again, once again, if only for a little while, to feel even a fraction of that wildly sweet emotion she had felt before.

Oh, for something, for someone, to matter vividly, beyond all telling. . . .

Savardi was marrying her because he could gain her no other way . . . after a frustrated effort to escape the tie!

She smiled bitterly in the starry darkness.

She was so modern, so accepting of all things, that she *could* smile.

"Oh heavens, how much one is influenced by nothing at all!" she told herself with sad amusement.

Blankness of life had made her encourage

Savardi, and only weakness prevented her breaking with him.

To-night life seemed a waste; she felt as if she were looking on a fête where she might not enter. . . .

A knock came at the door. Tony's man laid the late papers on the table.

She asked if Tony had gone to sleep, bade the man good night, and, as the door closed, walked to the table and lifted a paper and opened it.

A small head-line drew her gaze instantly; it contained Rex's name, and below was printed the news that he was lying dangerously ill at his house in St. James's Place, and added that he was suffering from the severe after-effects of a duel. A description of Greville House followed, and Doro read it through mechanically; her mind registered a mistake: the reporter stated the Italian frescoes were in the white drawing-room; he was wrong.

The paper slid from her grasp. She stood quite still in the brilliantly-lit room, and it seemed as if Rex were there visibly: Rex smiling at her, Rex angered, Rex become serious; little personal tricks of habit which were his returned to her mind; the way he smoothed his thick, smooth, fair hair; the attitudes he adopted in big chairs. . . .

London pulsed and throbbed outside; somewhere in the hotel a door banged.

The sharp sound released Doro from her inactive self: she put a hand up to her throat to stop the fluttering of her breath.

Dangerously ill. . . .

That was only written when there was no hope.
It meant a person would die. . . .

She thought of Rex dead—Rex, who so loved life.

And then—Rex, with his sense of humour, fighting a *duel!* . . .

Her mind linked the day of his departure, its secrecy, his casual note of farewell; he, who was so courteous a being . . . Savardi's bruised face and stiff arm.

She gave a little stifled cry, and put a clenched hand to her mouth.

And in that moment she hated Savardi. Because his conduct had hurt Rex, had brought Rex to this, every atom of self-defence, of tenderness, which her nature held, swung out to shield Rex.

It was eleven o'clock when she reached Greville House; the door stood open, a car waited before it. Doro walked straight in, and met Rex limping from the library.

She put out her hands, and he caught one and held it closely.

"Hullo," he said, rather hoarsely; "what very happy wind blows you here?"

Doro looked at him; she stammered out, her voice almost inaudible:

"The papers—the papers said——"

"That canard!" Rex interpolated swiftly, his white face flushed scarlet. "Surely you didn't believe it." He tried to laugh. "G showed it me at

dinner: it's abominable; I've had it contradicted, of course. Heaven knows how these reporters think of their lies. . . ."

He was talking to gain time, to recover himself; his illness had left him very weak.

Doro said dully:

"Nothing matters—the lies, I mean. You are here, alive—well——"

Her bewildered eyes rested on him piteously.

"Doro," he said gently, "my dear, it's all right. Of course it gave you a shock. But now—why did you come, you yourself, I mean so late?"

She smiled at him through sudden tears:

"I only knew the truth—so late," she whispered.

There was that in her eyes and voice a man sees and hears seldom.

Rex trembled . . . this hope after despair. . . . He forced himself to deny it; he dared not believe, not understand.

Steps sounded. A sure instinct that they two must be alone made them enter the library and close the door.

It was dark in there; the windows were open into the little private garden, a faint breeze swayed the heavy curtains slightly.

Desperately, Doro said:

"Why did you fight? Was it because—you—you knew?"

"I fought because I hated Savardi," Rex said with sudden hoarse ardentness; "hated him for loving you; no man loves his fortunate rival. He may respect him if he knows him to be the better man. I knew Savardi to be a cad, and he was in my way; I longed to fight him. I am glad I did."

"But I—I accepted his form of love, knowing," Doro murmured. "I—you must know that—you must—and oh! I don't know, I can't explain. . . ."

"You need not try," Rex said composedly. "I knew long ago. I understood. One does when one loves."

She went very close to him.

"I understood when I read you were ill, Rex. I knew then. It was as if I had been released from myself, from everything that clogged my steps. Do you remember, years ago, kissing me one night in Paris? And you said I should remember? I do—I do to-night——"

He put an arm round her, so lightly it scarcely touched her, and yet she knew in every fibre of her being that it was there.

He said, holding her in that still tenderness:

"I do understand—always——" His voice grew unsteady, very young somehow in its carefully restrained eagerness: "Doro, it's real, isn't it—you, you really love?"

Still he did not kiss her; he seemed to wait and his waiting brought to her, in some inexplicable

way, the knowledge that he waited because the moment was so marvellous.

Then he gave a quick boyish sigh, and whispered her name.

She put out a hand and drew down his head towards her.

"Oh, yes—yes," she whispered, her lips against his; "it is real—it is true—it is as if, my darling, my heart were at rest in yours—at last."

THE END

